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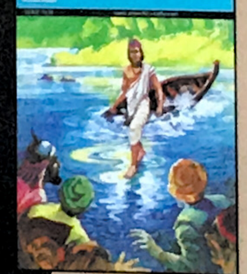

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AMAR CHITRA KATHA

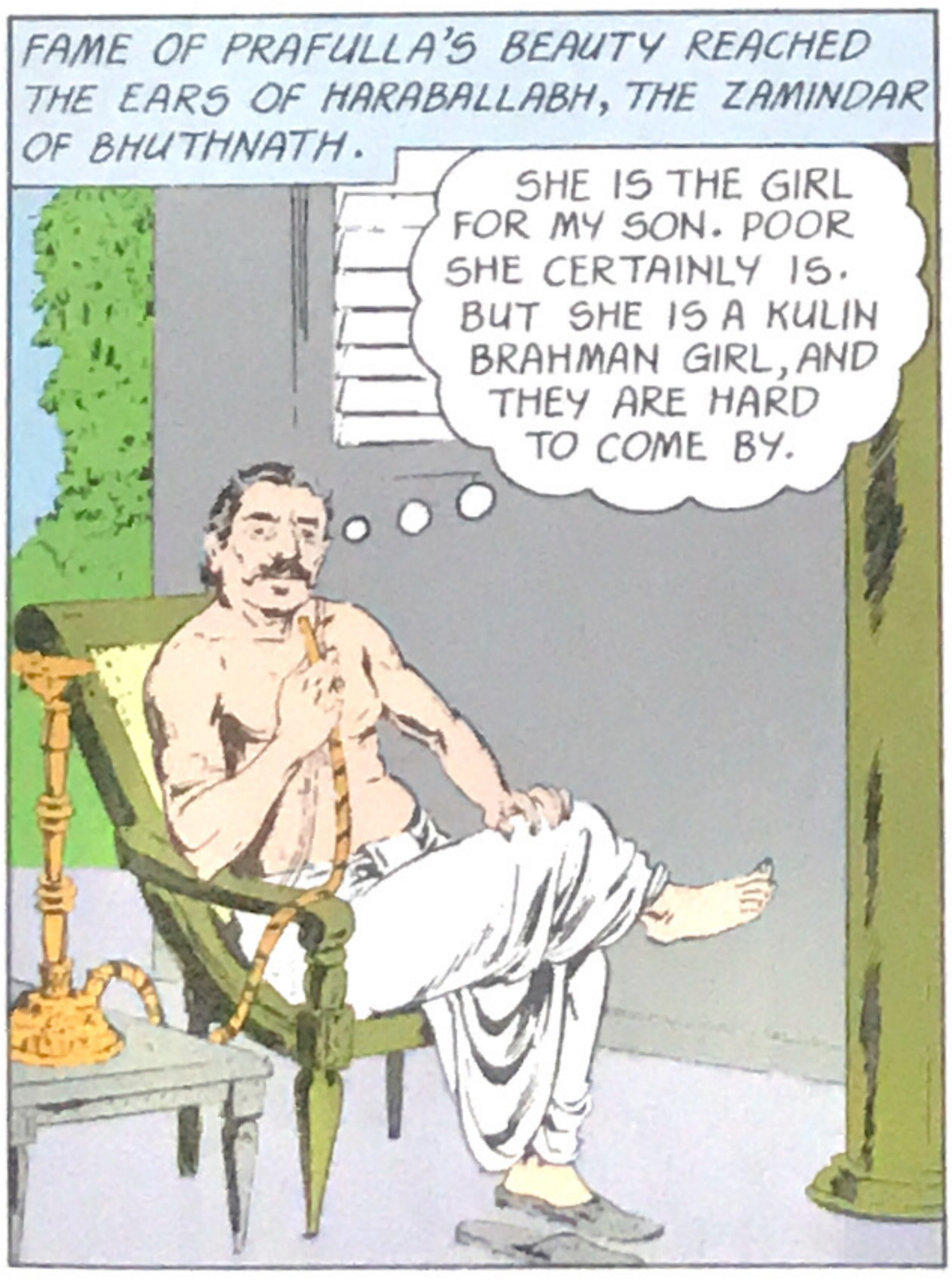
DEVI CHOUDHURANI

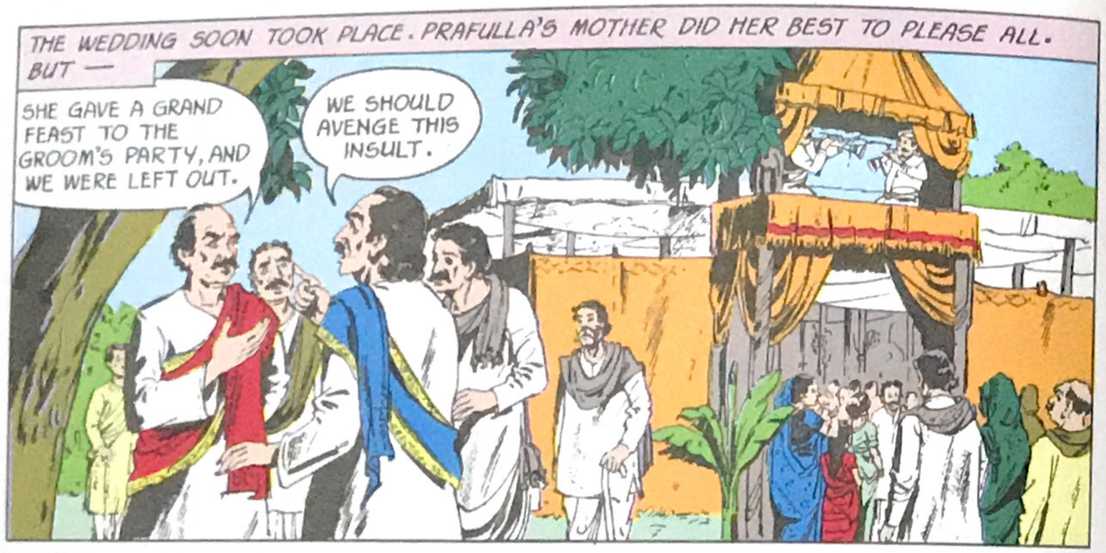
THE BANDIT QUEEN

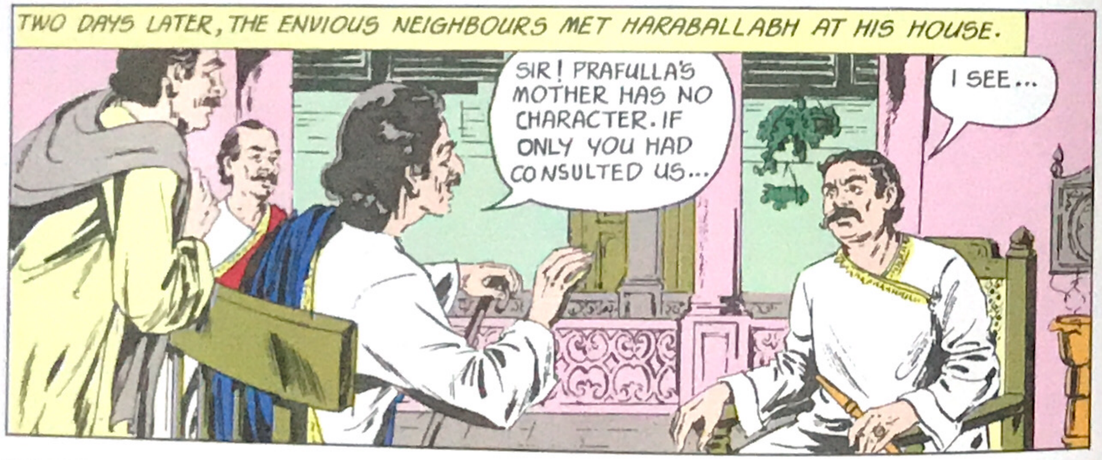
Vol 659 | ₹50

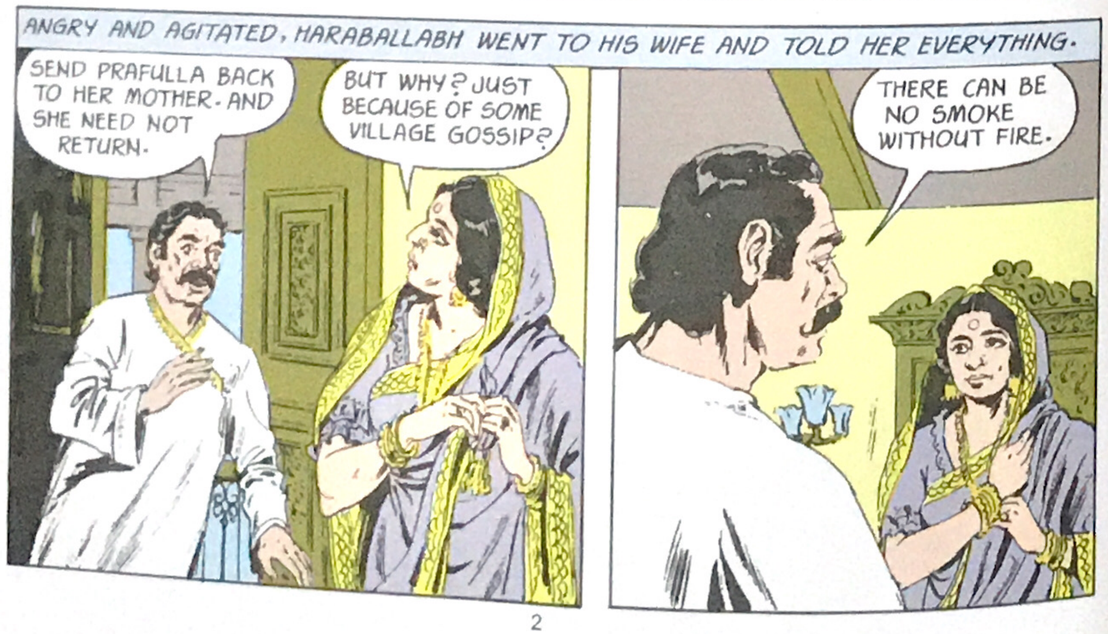
DEVI CHOUDHURANI

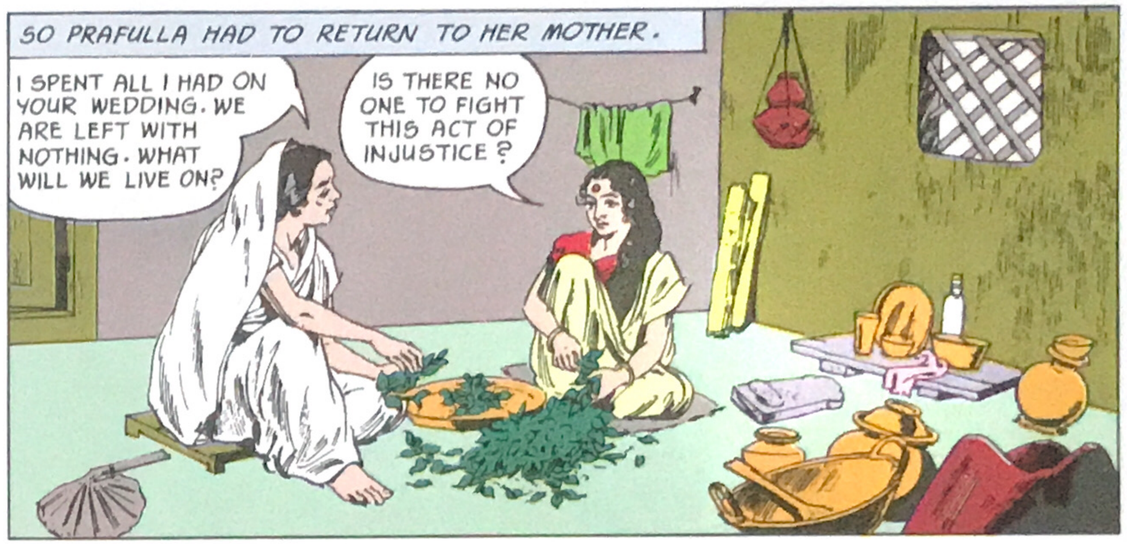
IN DURGAPUR, A SMALL VILLAGE OF NORTH BENGAL, THERE LIVED A POOR BRAHMAN WIDOW WITH HER BEAUTIFUL DAUGHTER, PRAFULLA.

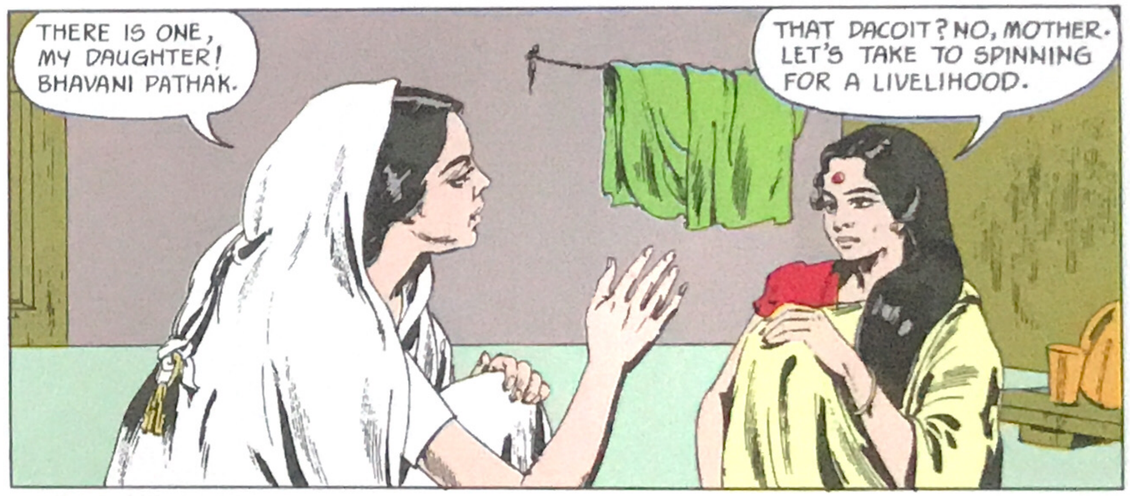



THE WEDDING SOON TOOK PLACE. PRAFULLA'S MOTHER DID HER BEST TO PLEASE ALL. BUT —
SHE GAVE A GRAND FEAST TO THE GROOM'S PARTY, AND WE WERE LEFT OUT.
WE SHOULD AVENGE THIS INSULT.

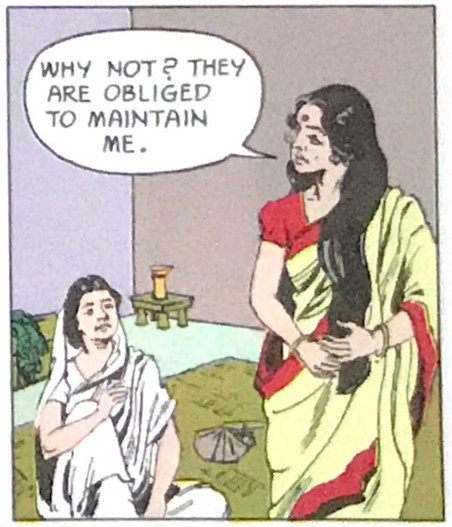

TWO DAYS LATER, THE ENVIOUS NEIGHBOURS MET HARABALLABH AT HIS HOUSE.
SIR! PRAFULLA'S MOTHER HAS NO CHARACTER. IF ONLY YOU HAD CONSULTED US...
I SEE...

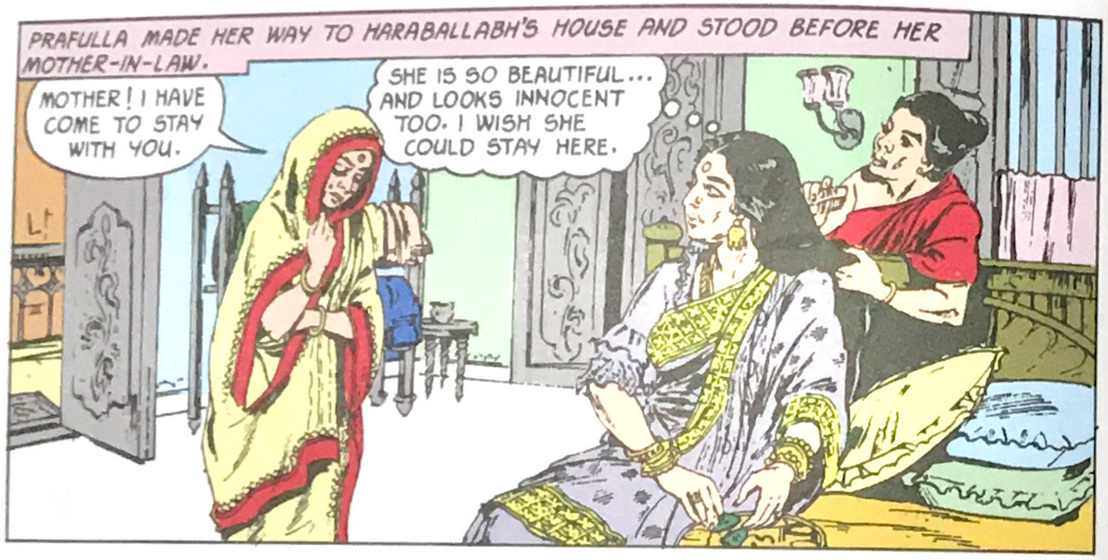

ANGRY AND AGITATED, HARABALLABH WENT TO HIS WIFE AND TOLD HER EVERYTHING.
SEND PRAFULLA BACK TO HER MOTHER. AND SHE NEED NOT RETURN.
BUT WHY? JUST BECAUSE OF SOME VILLAGE GOSSIP?
THERE CAN BE NO SMOKE WITHOUT FIRE.

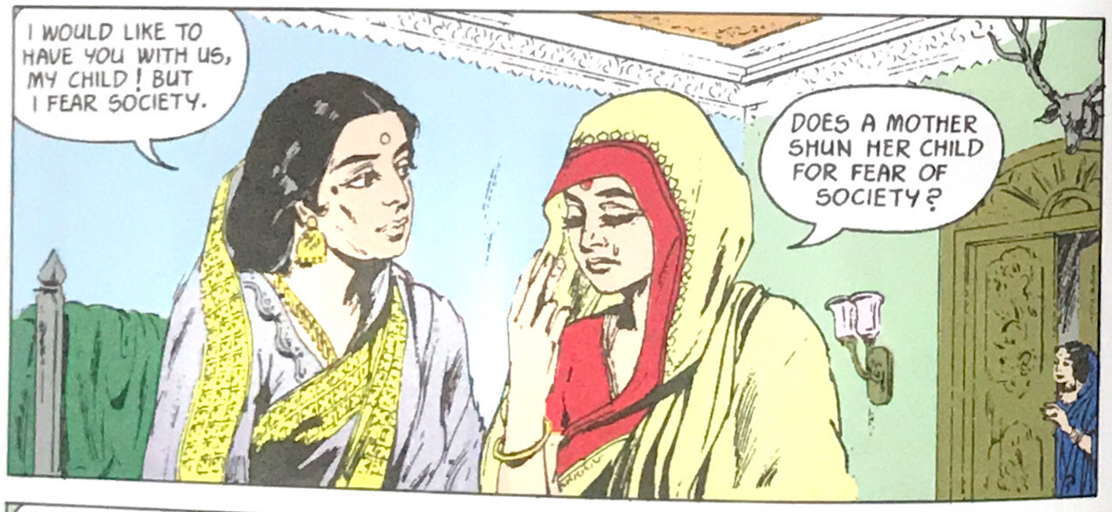

SO PRAFULLA HAD TO RETURN TO HER MOTHER.
I SPENT ALL I HAD ON YOUR WEDDING. WE ARE LEFT WITH NOTHING. WHAT WILL WE LIVE ON?
IS THERE NO ONE TO FIGHT THIS ACT OF INJUSTICE?

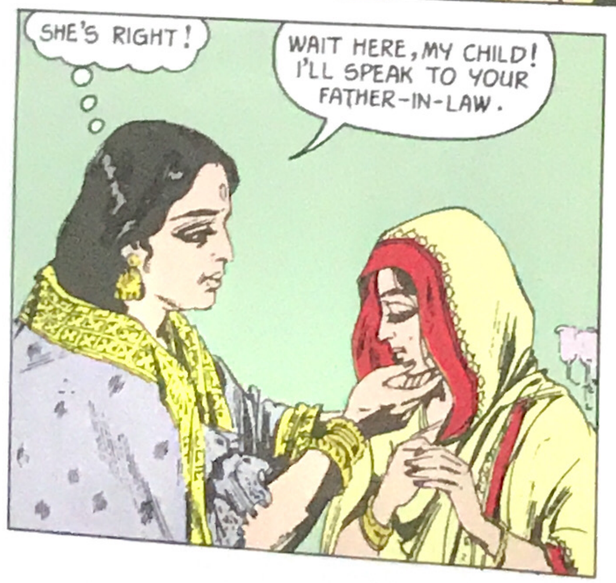

THERE IS ONE, MY DAUGHTER! BHAVANI PATHAK.
THAT DACOIT? NO, MOTHER. LET'S TAKE TO SPINNING FOR A LIVELIHOOD.

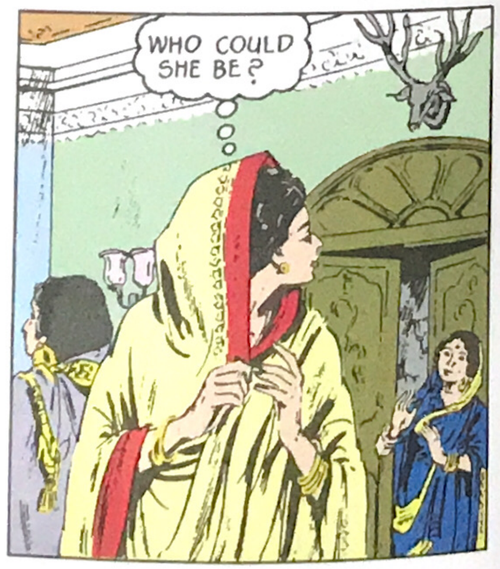
THE TWO WOMEN SPENT TWO YEARS IN DIRE POVERTY. THEN ONE DAY —
MOTHER! I CAN'T SEE YOU STARVING FOR MY SAKE. I'D RATHER GO TO MY IN-LAWS...
...AND BE HUMILIATED? NO, MY CHILD!

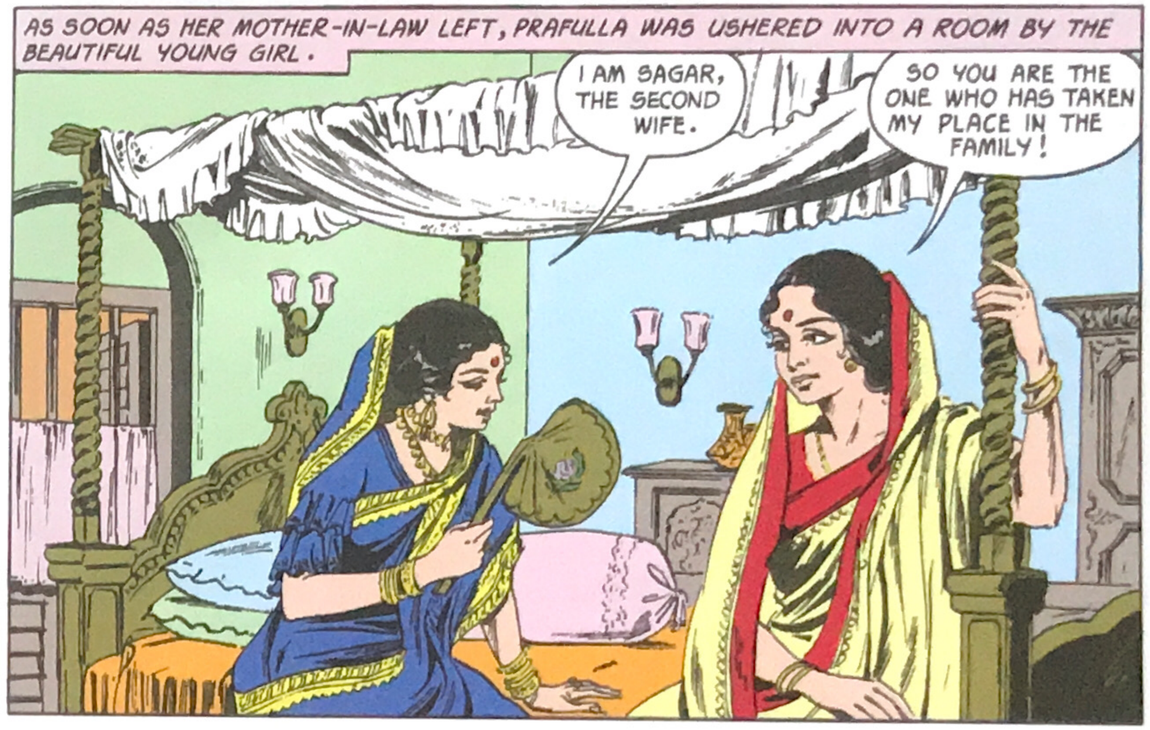

WHY NOT? THEY ARE OBLIGED TO MAINTAIN ME.

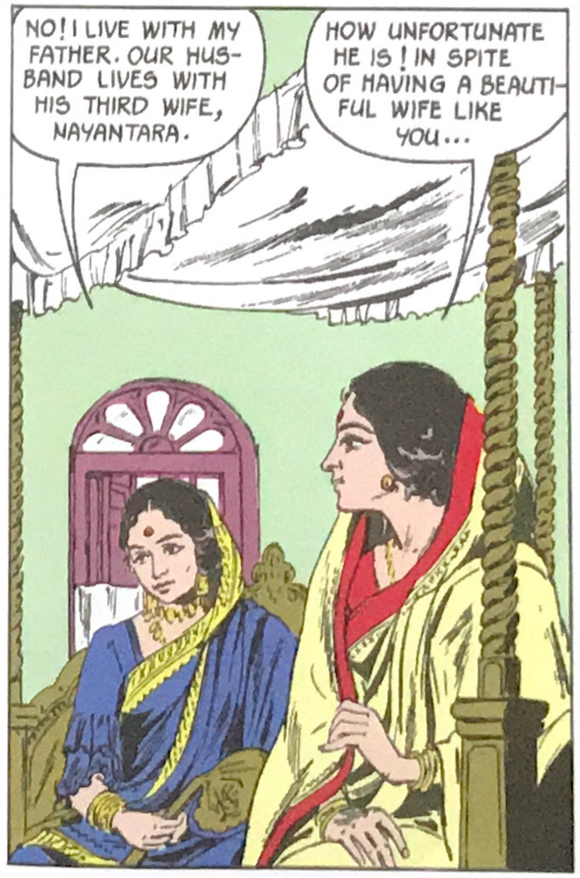

PRAFULLA MADE HER WAY TO HARABALLABH'S HOUSE AND STOOD BEFORE HER MOTHER-IN-LAW.
MOTHER! I HAVE COME TO STAY WITH YOU.
SHE IS SO BEAUTIFUL... AND LOOKS INNOCENT TOO. I WISH SHE COULD STAY HERE.


I WOULD LIKE TO HAVE YOU WITH US, MY CHILD! BUT I FEAR SOCIETY.
DOES A MOTHER SHUN HER CHILD FOR FEAR OF SOCIETY?

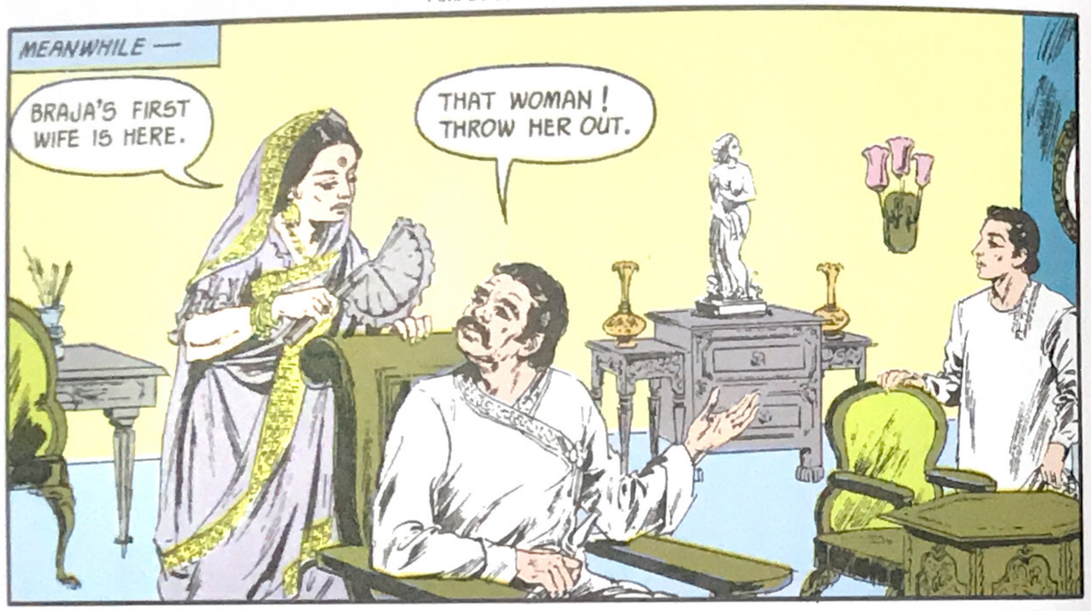

SHE'S RIGHT!
WAIT HERE, MY CHILD! I'LL SPEAK TO YOUR FATHER-IN-LAW.

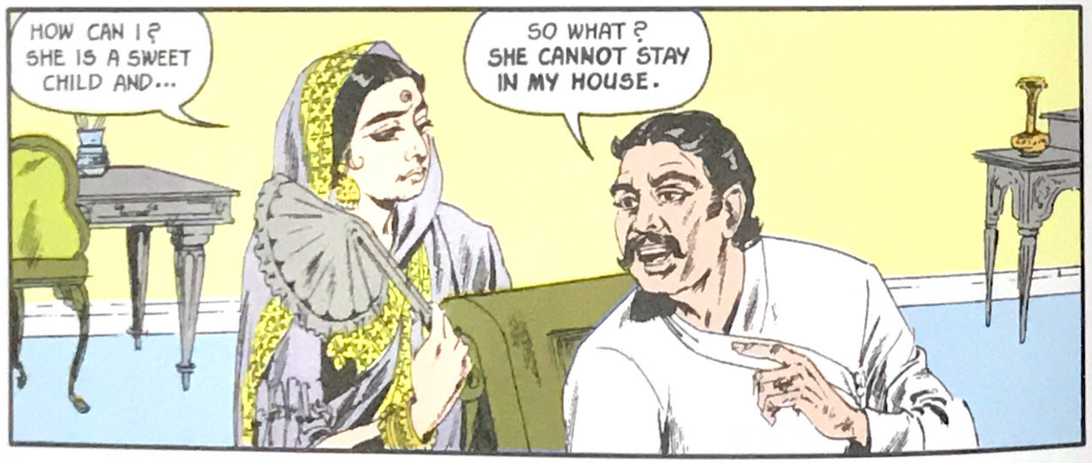

WHO COULD SHE BE?

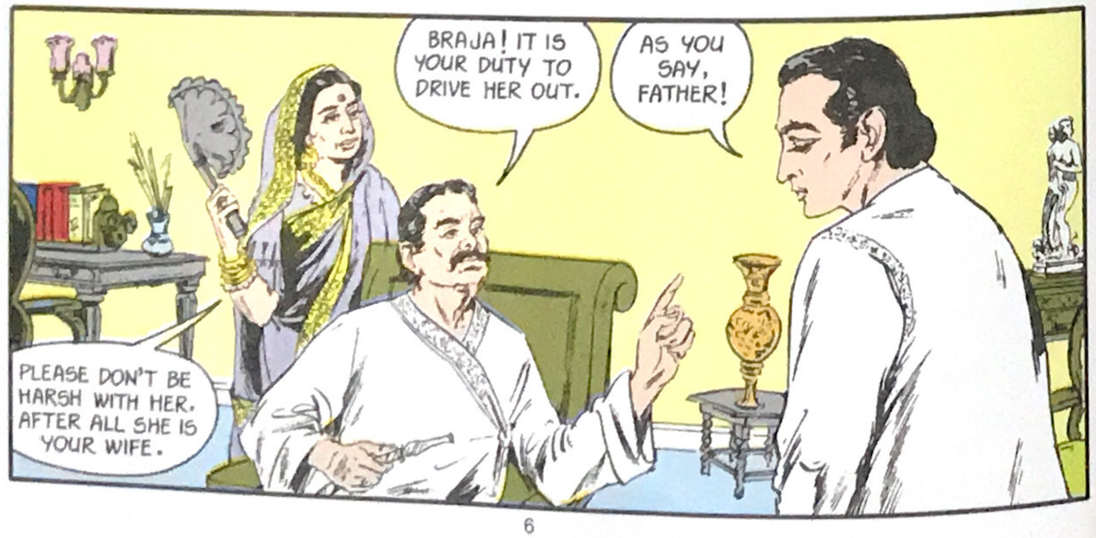

AS SOON AS HER MOTHER-IN-LAW LEFT, PRAFULLA WAS USHERED INTO A ROOM BY THE BEAUTIFUL YOUNG GIRL.
I AM SAGAR, THE SECOND WIFE.
SO YOU ARE THE ONE WHO HAS TAKEN MY PLACE IN THE FAMILY!

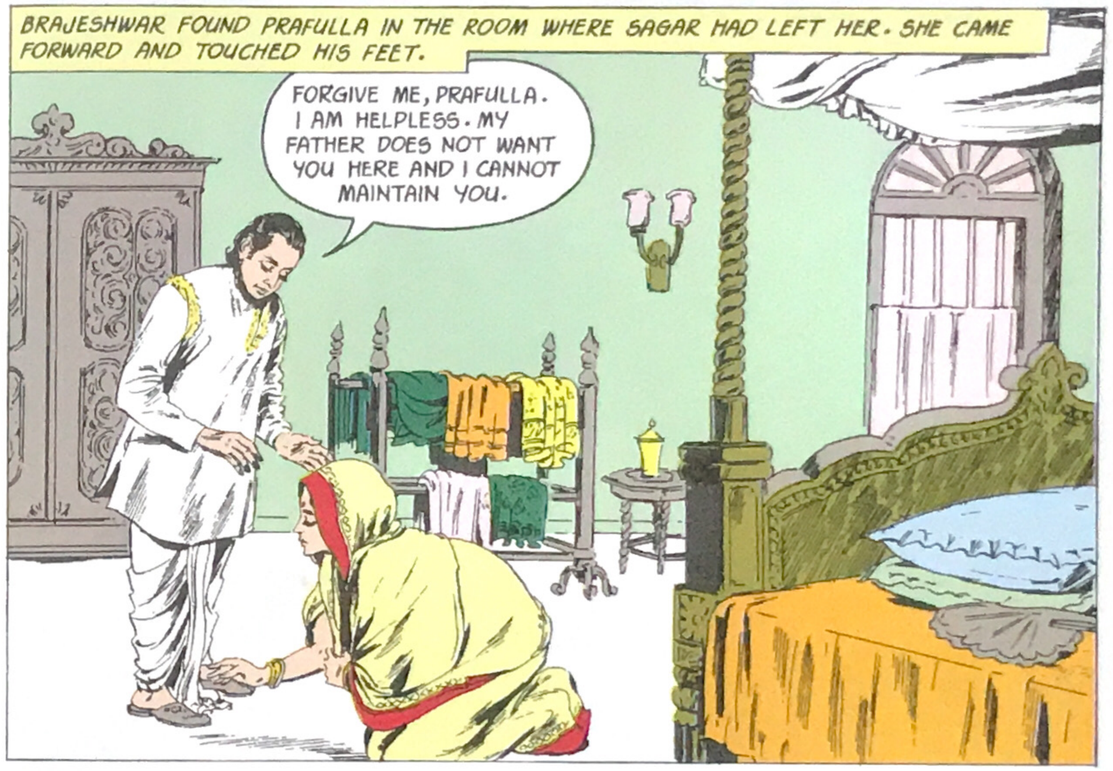

NO! I LIVE WITH MY FATHER. OUR HUSBAND LIVES WITH HIS THIRD WIFE, NAYANTARA.
HOW UNFORTUNATE HE IS! IN SPITE OF HAVING A BEAUTIFUL WIFE LIKE YOU...

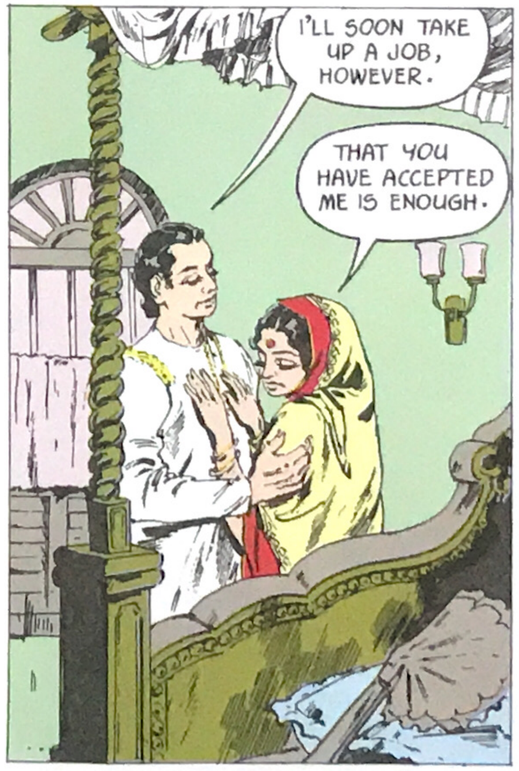
WHAT ABOUT YOU? THERE IS NONE PRETTIER THAN YOU!


MEANWHILE —
BRAJA'S FIRST WIFE IS HERE.
THAT WOMAN! THROW HER OUT.

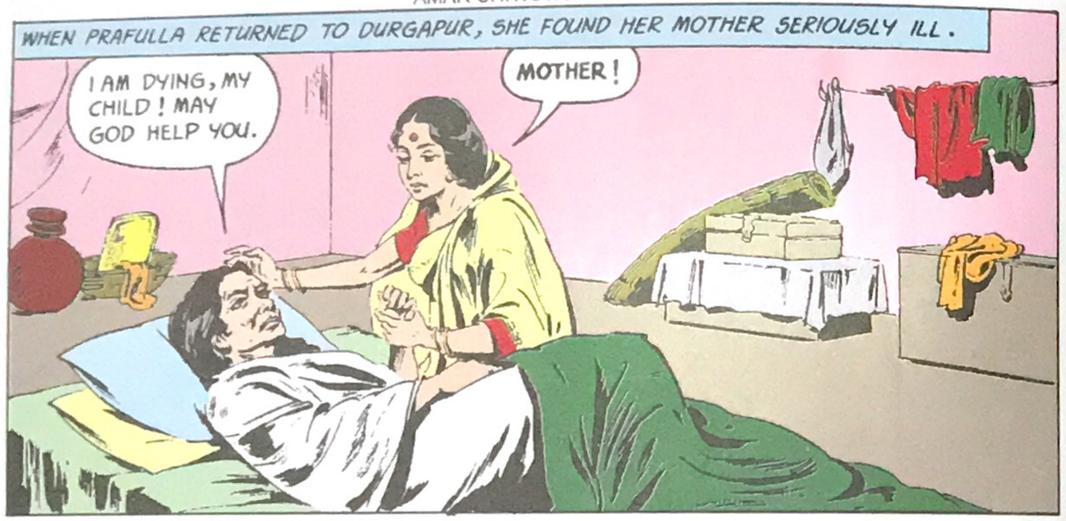

HOW CAN I? SHE IS A SWEET CHILD AND...
SO WHAT? SHE CANNOT STAY IN MY HOUSE.

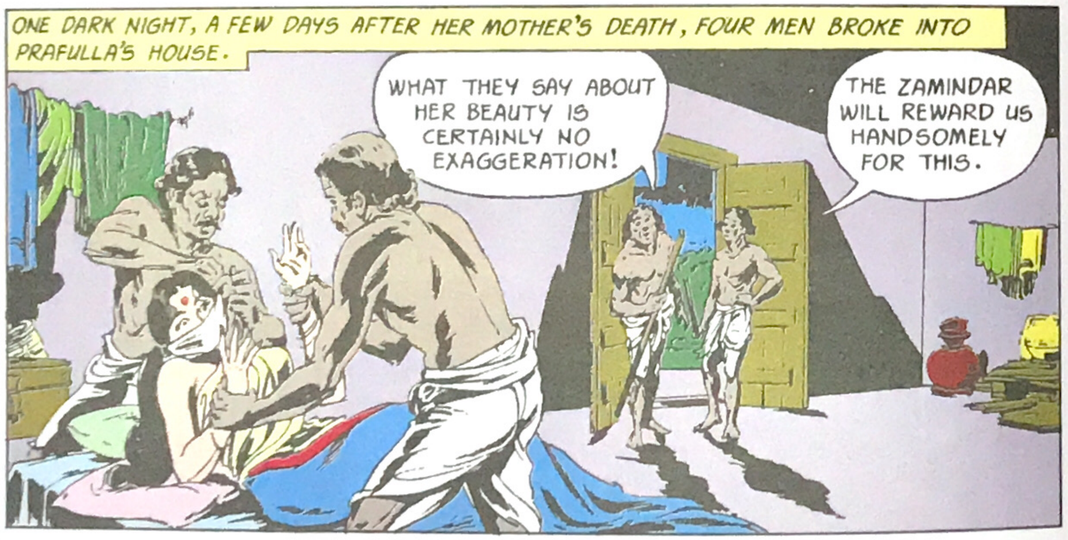

BRAJA! IT IS YOUR DUTY TO DRIVE HER OUT.
AS YOU SAY, FATHER!
PLEASE DON'T BE HARSH WITH HER. AFTER ALL SHE IS YOUR WIFE.

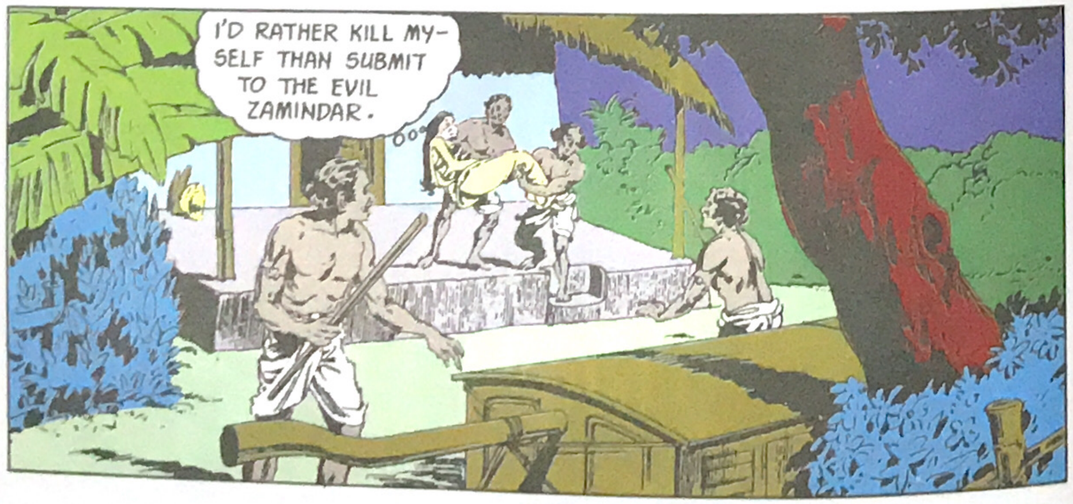

BRAJESHWAR FOUND PRAFULLA IN THE ROOM WHERE SAGAR HAD LEFT HER. SHE CAME FORWARD AND TOUCHED HIS FEET.
FORGIVE ME, PRAFULLA. I AM HELPLESS. MY FATHER DOES NOT WANT YOU HERE AND I CANNOT MAINTAIN YOU.

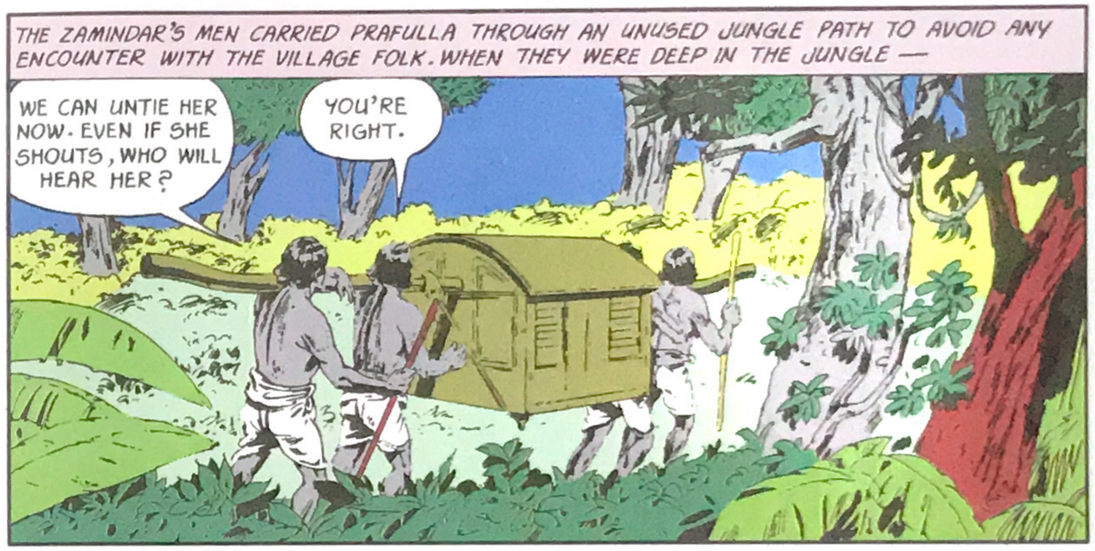

I'LL SOON TAKE UP A JOB, HOWEVER.
THAT YOU HAVE ACCEPTED ME IS ENOUGH.

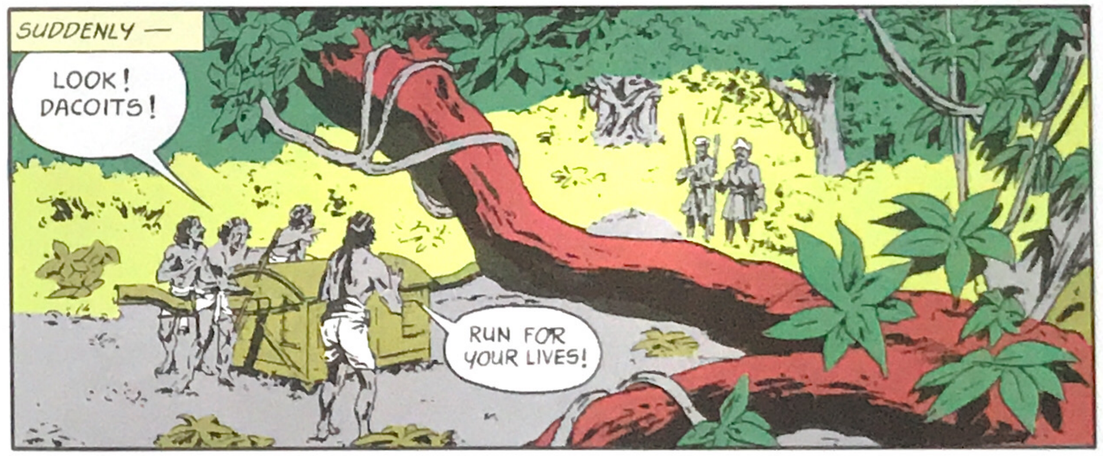
BRAJESHWAR BROUGHT OUT HIS DIAMOND RING AND GAVE IT TO HER.
SELL IT AND USE THE MONEY TILL I AM IN A POSITION TO MAINTAIN YOU.
IT HAS YOUR NAME ENGRAVED ON IT. I WON'T PART WITH IT EVEN IF I HAVE TO STARVE.

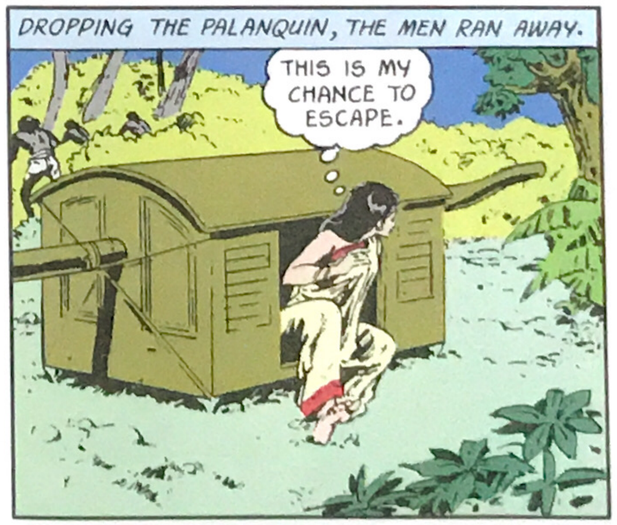

WHEN PRAFULLA RETURNED TO DURGAPUR, SHE FOUND HER MOTHER SERIOUSLY ILL.
I AM DYING, MY CHILD! MAY GOD HELP YOU.
MOTHER!


ONE DARK NIGHT, A FEW DAYS AFTER HER MOTHER'S DEATH, FOUR MEN BROKE INTO PRAFULLA'S HOUSE.
WHAT THEY SAY ABOUT HER BEAUTY IS CERTAINLY NO EXAGGERATION!
THE ZAMINDAR WILL REWARD US HANDSOMELY FOR THIS.

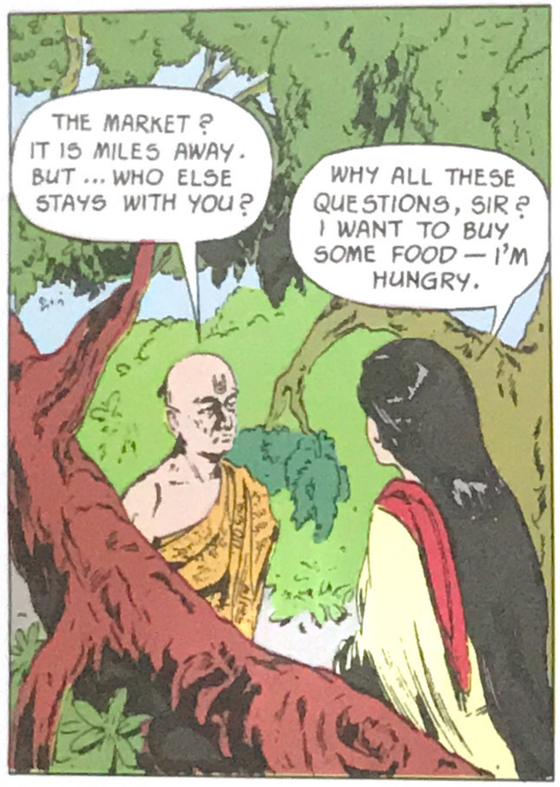

I'D RATHER KILL MYSELF THAN SUBMIT TO THE EVIL ZAMINDAR.


THE ZAMINDAR'S MEN CARRIED PRAFULLA THROUGH AN UNUSED JUNGLE PATH TO AVOID ANY ENCOUNTER WITH THE VILLAGE FOLK. WHEN THEY WERE DEEP IN THE JUNGLE —
WE CAN UNTIE HER NOW. EVEN IF SHE SHOUTS, WHO WILL HEAR HER?
YOU'RE RIGHT.

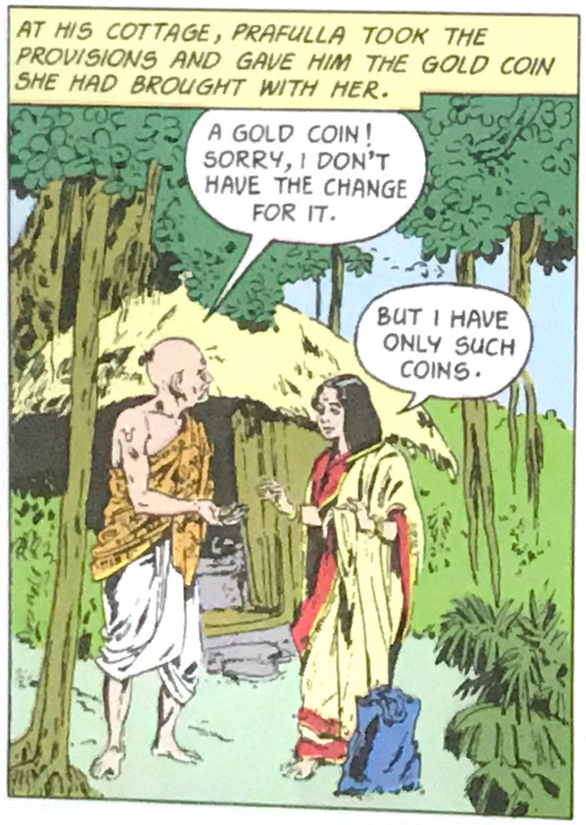

SUDDENLY —
LOOK! DACOITS!
RUN FOR YOUR LIVES!

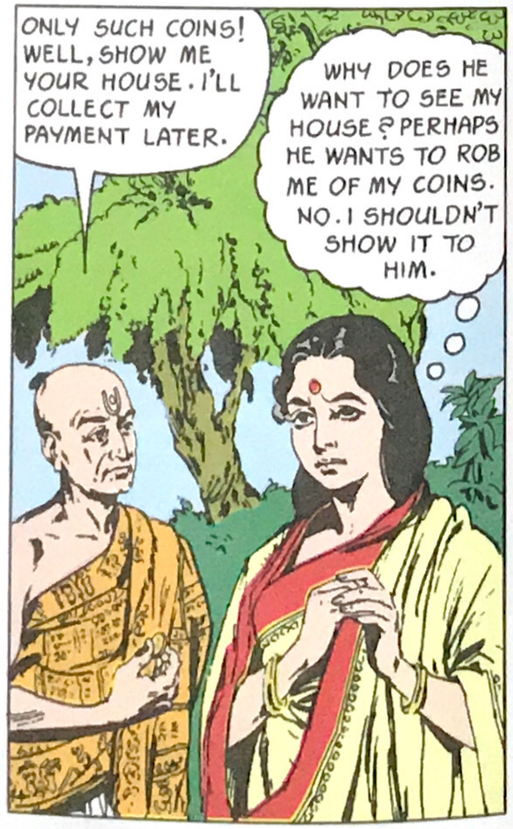

DROPPING THE PALANQUIN, THE MEN RAN AWAY.
THIS IS MY CHANCE TO ESCAPE.

* AN AFFECTIONATE TERM OF ADDRESS FOR WOMEN OF ALL AGES.

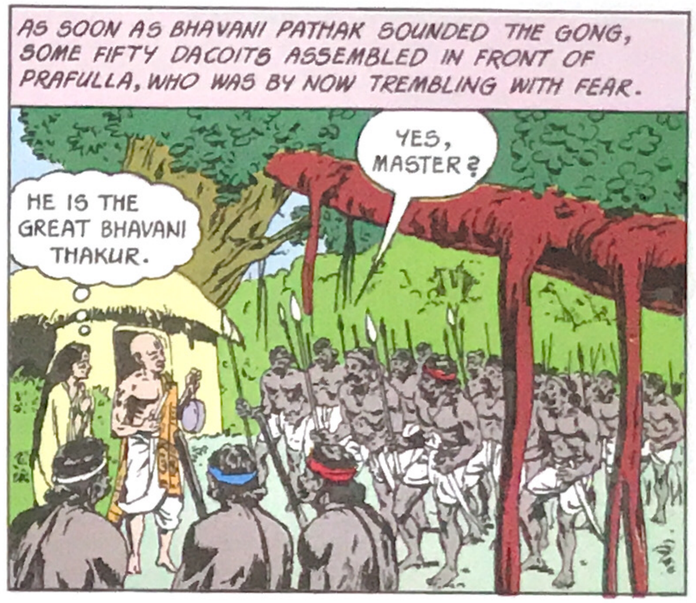

THE MARKET? IT IS MILES AWAY. BUT ... WHO ELSE STAYS WITH YOU?
WHY ALL THESE QUESTIONS, SIR? I WANT TO BUY SOME FOOD — I'M HUNGRY.

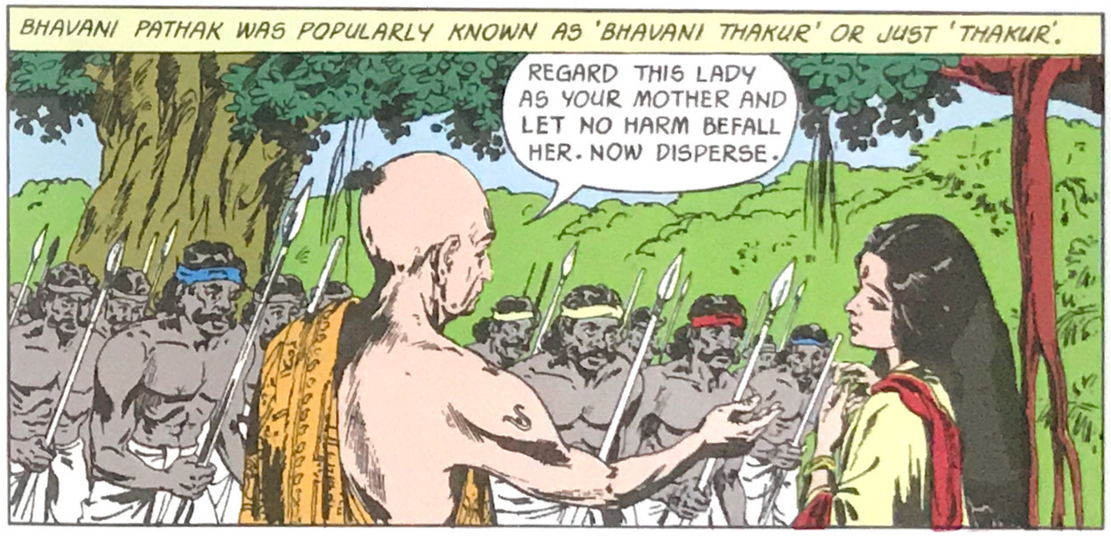
YOU MAY BUY WHAT YOU NEED FROM MY COTTAGE.
THANK YOU, SIR!


AT HIS COTTAGE, PRAFULLA TOOK THE PROVISIONS AND GAVE HIM THE GOLD COIN SHE HAD BROUGHT WITH HER.
A GOLD COIN! SORRY, I DON'T HAVE THE CHANGE FOR IT.
BUT I HAVE ONLY SUCH COINS.

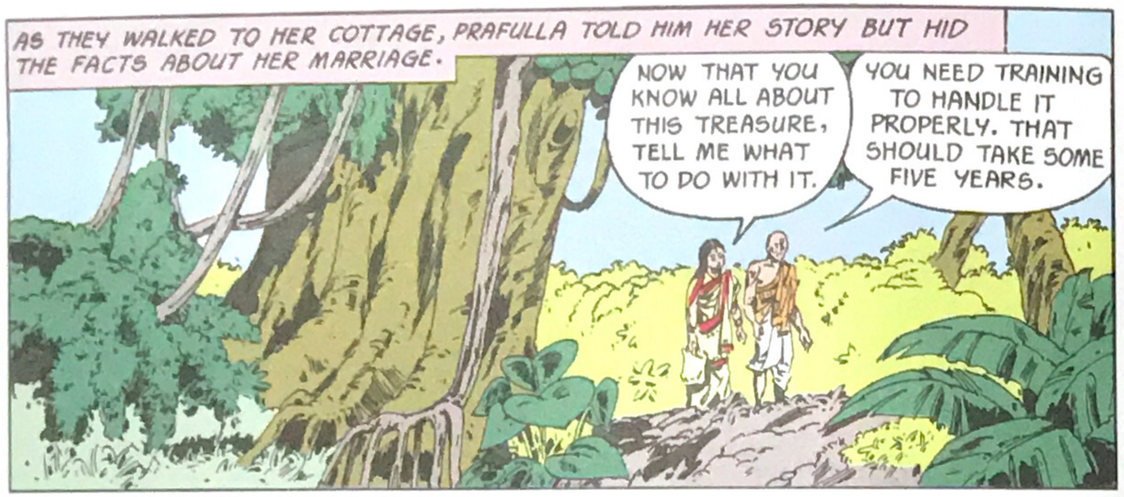

ONLY SUCH COINS! WELL, SHOW ME YOUR HOUSE. I'LL COLLECT MY PAYMENT LATER.
WHY DOES HE WANT TO SEE MY HOUSE? PERHAPS HE WANTS TO ROB ME OF MY COINS. NO. I SHOULDN'T SHOW IT TO HIM.

I KNOW WHY YOU HESITATE. YOU THINK I AM A THIEF. I AM BHAVANI PATHAK. AND HERE IS THE PROOF.


AS SOON AS BHAVANI PATHAK SOUNDED THE GONG, SOME FIFTY DACOITS ASSEMBLED IN FRONT OF PRAFULLA, WHO WAS BY NOW TREMBLING WITH FEAR.
YES, MASTER?
HE IS THE GREAT BHAVANI THAKUR.

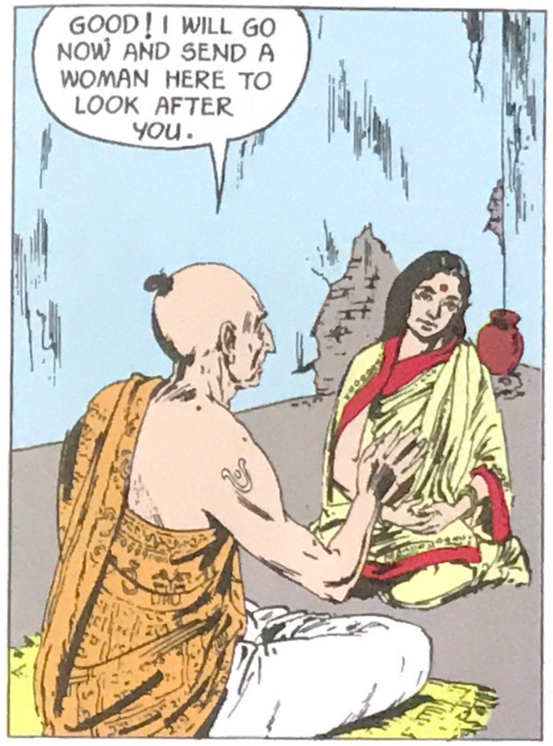

BHAVANI PATHAK WAS POPULARLY KNOWN AS 'BHAVANI THAKUR' OR JUST 'THAKUR'.
REGARD THIS LADY AS YOUR MOTHER AND LET NO HARM BEFALL HER. NOW DISPERSE.

AFTER THE DACOITS HAD GONE —
THERE! YOU CANNOT LEAVE THIS PLACE UNLESS I WISH IT. BUT TRUST ME — NO HARM WILL COME TO YOU.
THAT LEAVES ME LITTLE CHOICE. I WILL TELL HIM ALL AND SEEK HIS ADVICE.

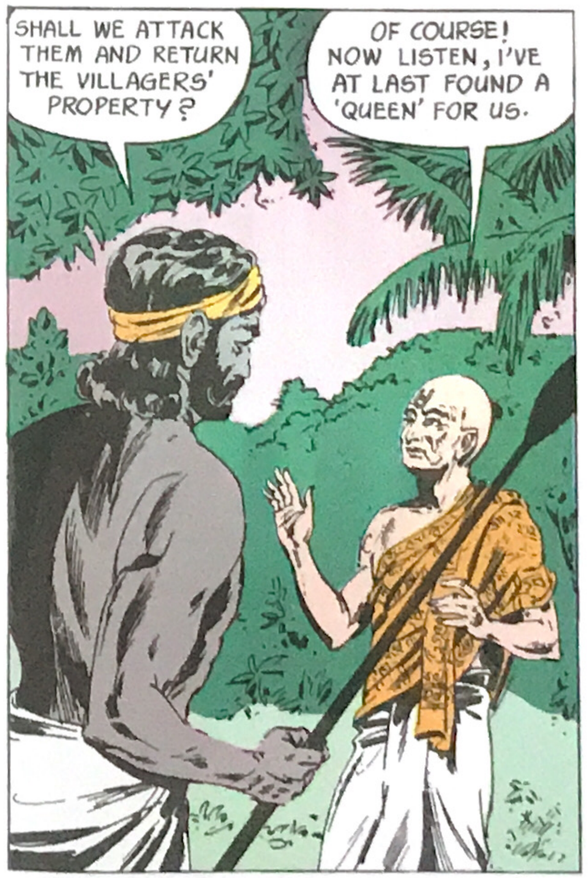

AS THEY WALKED TO HER COTTAGE, PRAFULLA TOLD HIM HER STORY BUT HID THE FACTS ABOUT HER MARRIAGE.
NOW THAT YOU KNOW ALL ABOUT THIS TREASURE, TELL ME WHAT TO DO WITH IT.
YOU NEED TRAINING TO HANDLE IT PROPERLY. THAT SHOULD TAKE SOME FIVE YEARS.

I CAN TRAIN YOU IF YOU ARE WILLING TO FOLLOW MY INSTRUCTIONS WITHOUT QUESTIONING THEM AND...

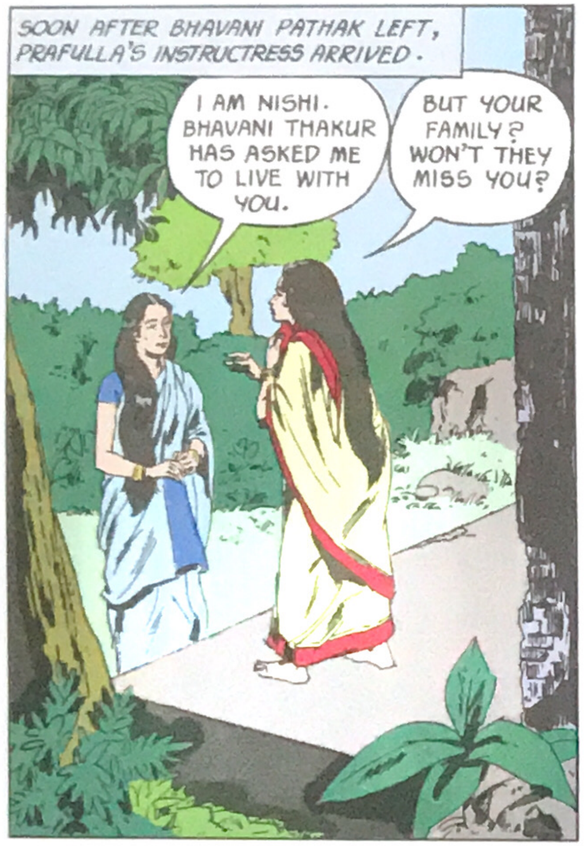
...IF YOU AGREE NOT TO TOUCH THAT MONEY BEFORE THE TRAINING IS OVER.
I ACCEPT THE CONDITIONS, SIR!

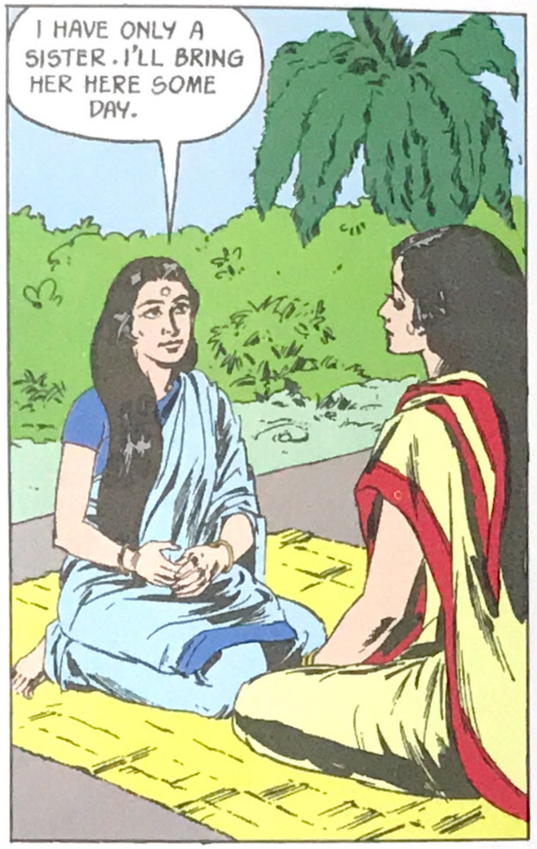

GOOD! I WILL GO NOW AND SEND A WOMAN HERE TO LOOK AFTER YOU.

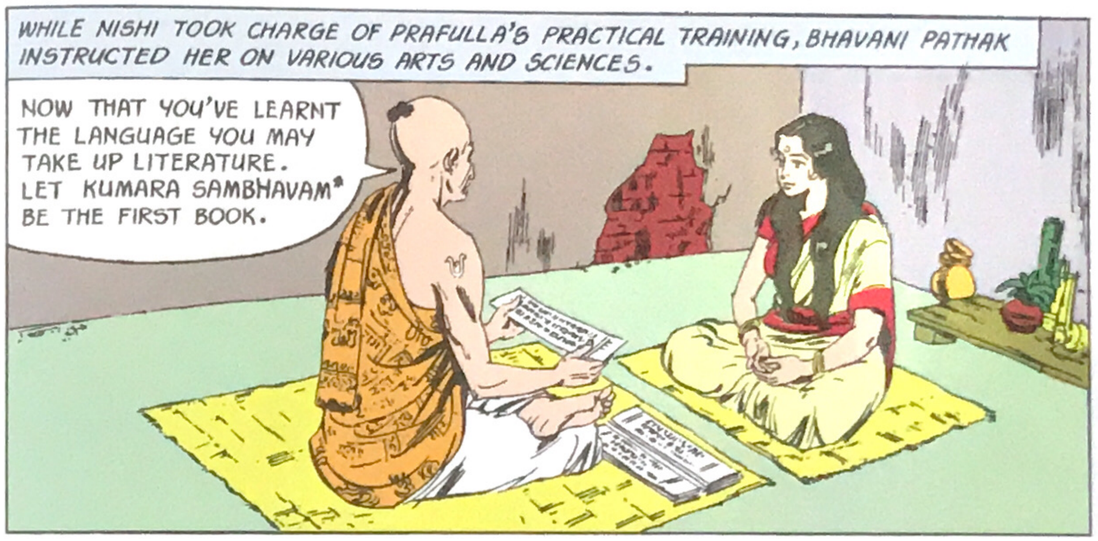
AS BHAVANI PATHAK CAME OUT OF THE COTTAGE, HE MET HIS DEPUTY, RANGARAJ.
WHAT'S THE MATTER, RANGARAJ? YOU LOOK PERTURBED.
THE GOVERNMENT TAX-COLLECTORS HAVE LOOTED RANGPUR VILLAGE.

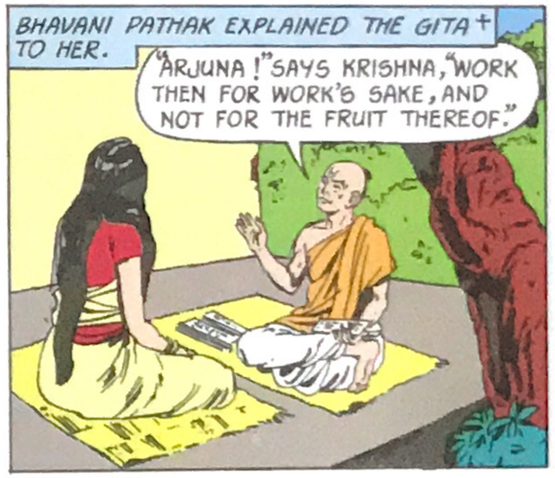

SHALL WE ATTACK THEM AND RETURN THE VILLAGERS' PROPERTY?
OF COURSE! NOW LISTEN, I'VE AT LAST FOUND A 'QUEEN' FOR US.

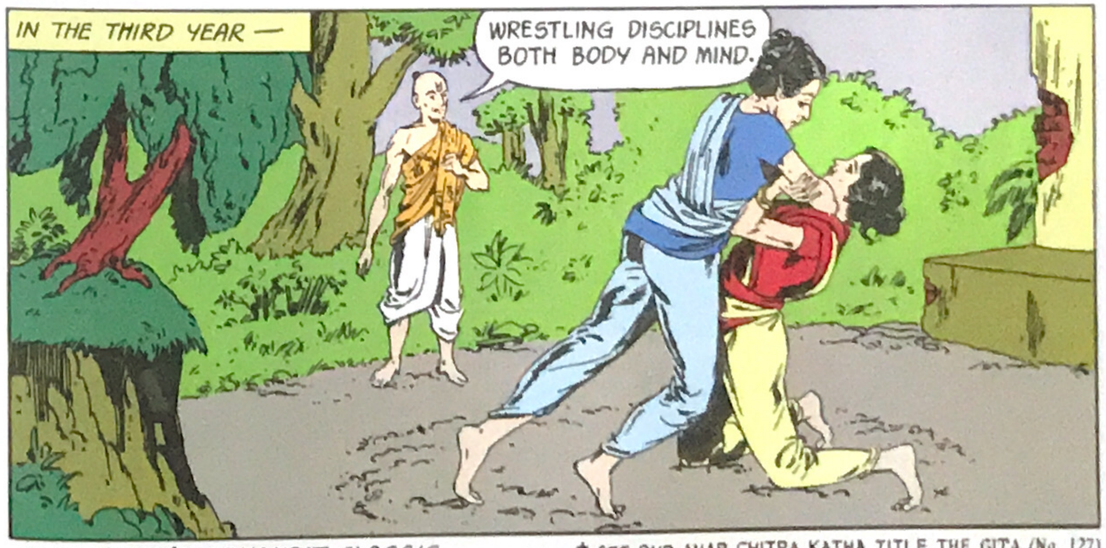
SHE WILL BE TRAINED TO RULE WITHIN FIVE YEARS. SHE HAS BEAUTY, MONEY AND COURAGE.





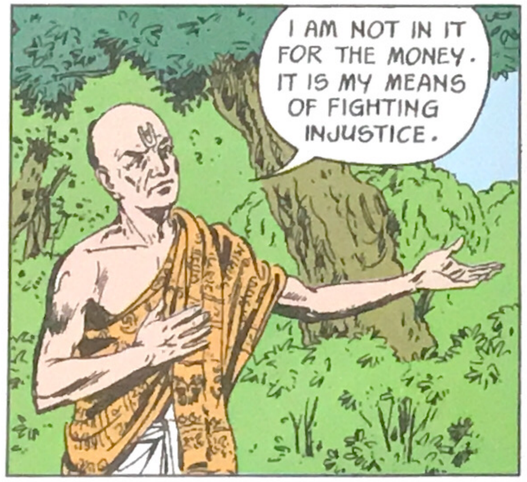






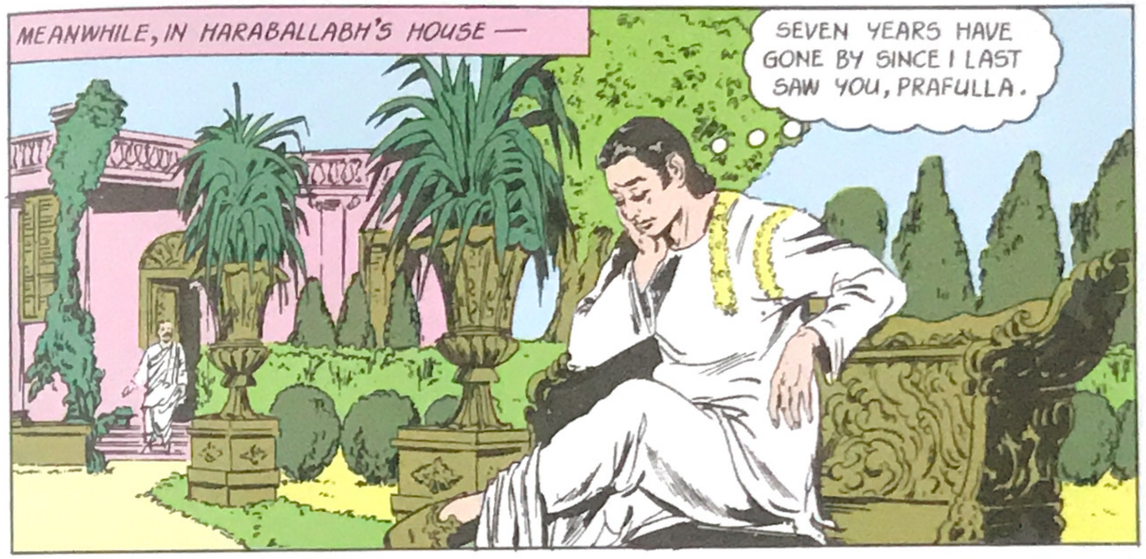
* KALIDASA'S SANSKRIT CLASSIC.

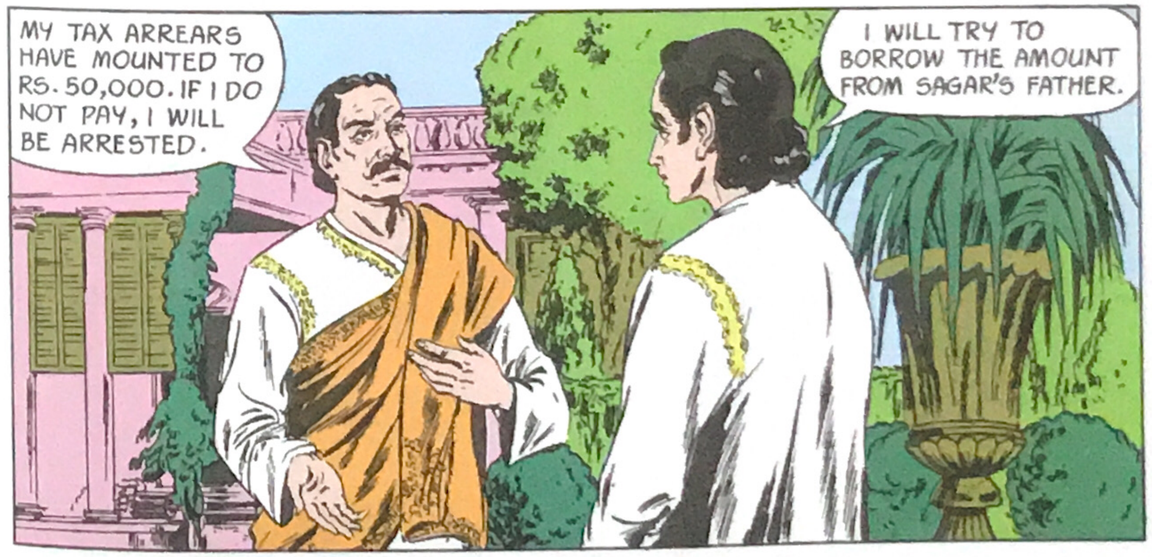
+ SEE OUR AMAR CHITRA KATHA TITLE, THE GITA (No. 127)

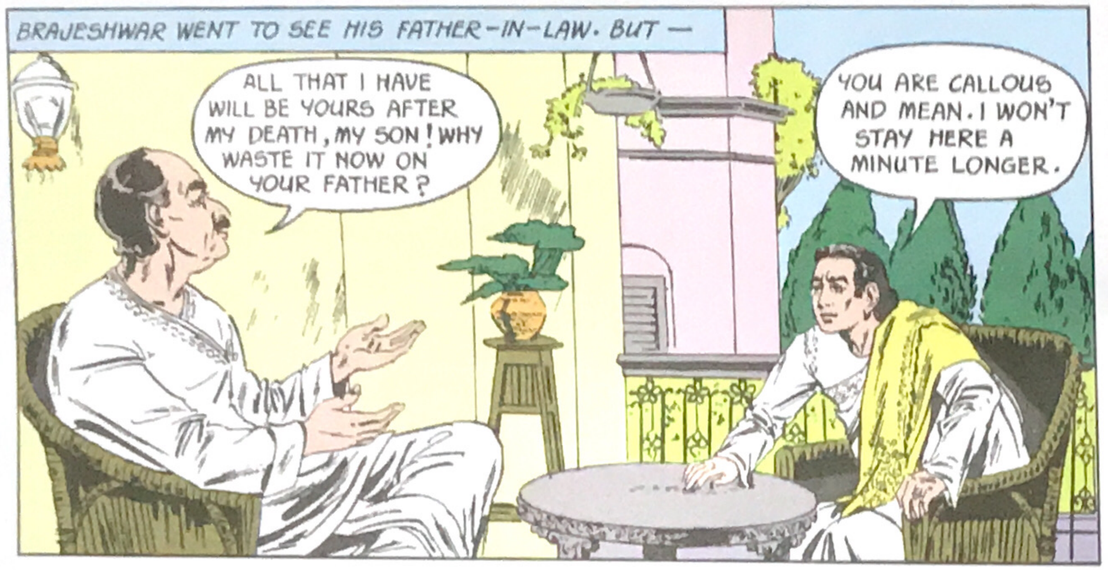


PRAFULLA THUS BECAME THE LEADER OF THE DACOIT GANG. IN A SHORT PERIOD SHE BECAME WELL-KNOWN ALL OVER BENGAL AS DEVI CHOUDHURANI *

* FEMININE OF CHOUDHURI, WHICH MEANS CHIEFTAIN.

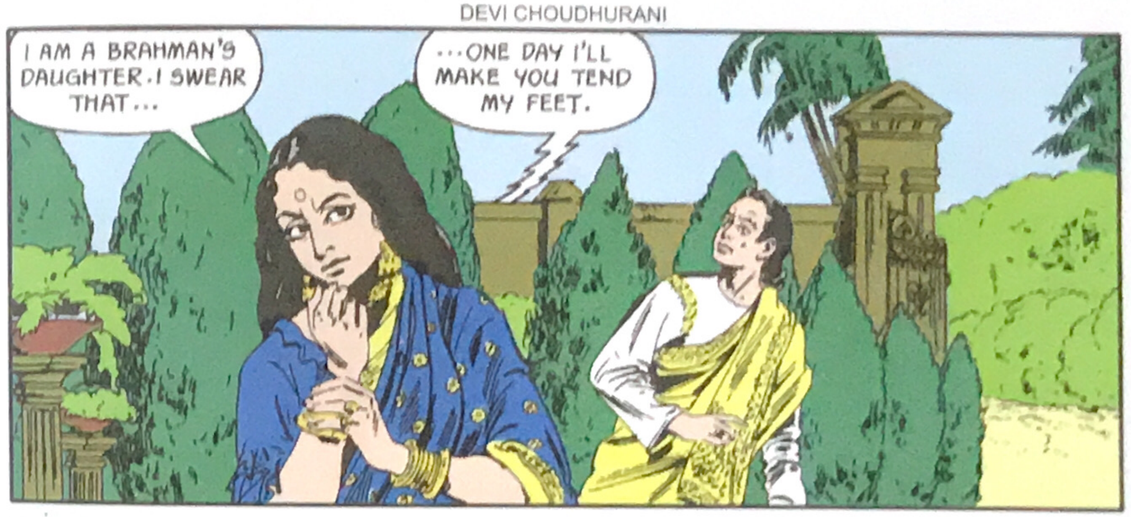


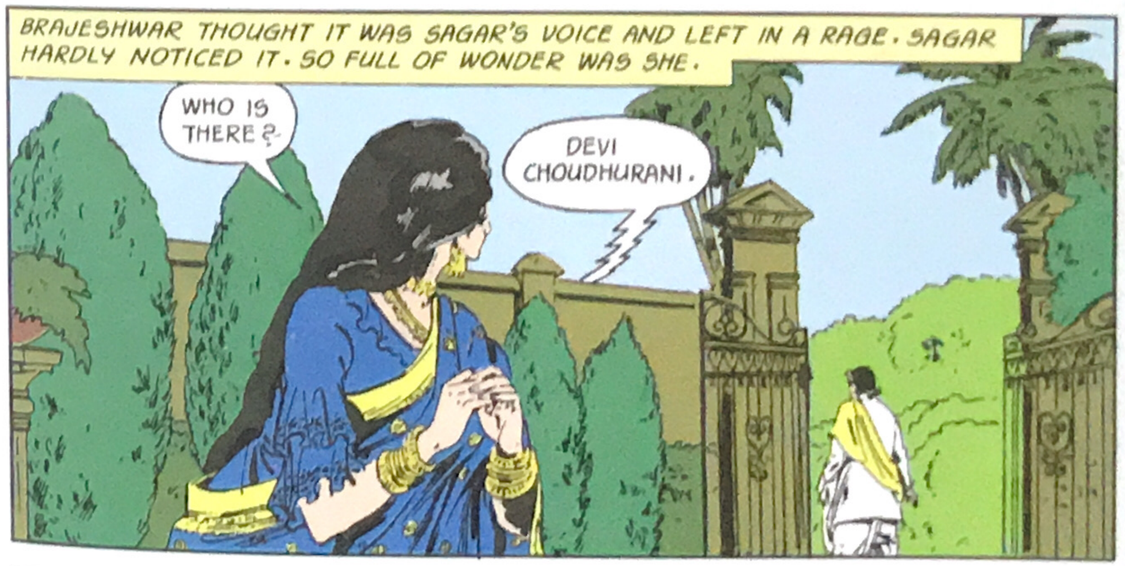


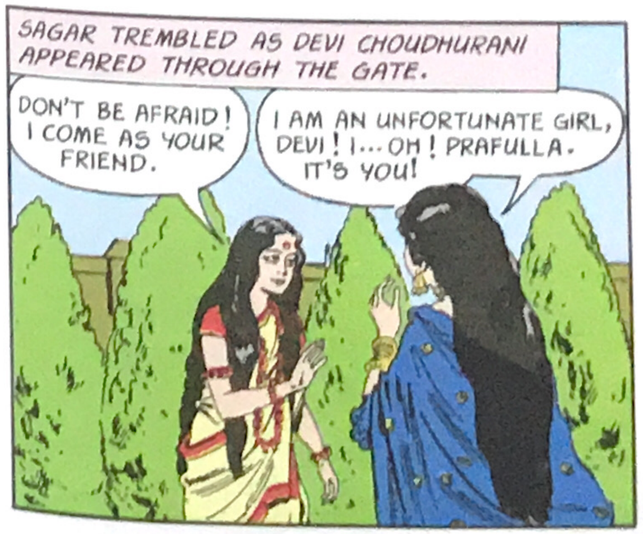

BRAJESHWAR WENT TO SEE HIS FATHER-IN-LAW. BUT —
ALL THAT I HAVE WILL BE YOURS AFTER MY DEATH, MY SON! WHY WASTE IT NOW ON YOUR FATHER?
YOU ARE CALLOUS AND MEAN. I WON'T STAY HERE A MINUTE LONGER.

BRAJESHWAR RUSHED OUT IN A RAGE. SAGAR RAN OUT AFTER HIM AND FELL AT HIS FEET.
TAKE ME WITH YOU. I HAVE DONE NO WRONG.
NO. I HAVE SEVERED ALL TIES WITH YOU AND YOUR FATHER.

WHEN BRAJESHWAR TRIED TO FREE HIS LEGS, SAGAR WAS HURT.
HOW DARE YOU KICK YOUR LAWFUL WIFE!
GET OUT OF MY WAY. I AM NO SLAVE TO ANY RICH MAN'S DAUGHTER.


I AM A BRAHMAN'S DAUGHTER. I SWEAR THAT...
...ONE DAY I'LL MAKE YOU TEND MY FEET.


BRAJESHWAR THOUGHT IT WAS SAGAR'S VOICE AND LEFT IN A RAGE. SAGAR HARDLY NOTICED IT. SO FULL OF WONDER WAS SHE.
WHO IS THERE?
DEVI CHOUDHURANI.


SAGAR TREMBLED AS DEVI CHOUDHURANI APPEARED THROUGH THE GATE.
DON'T BE AFRAID! I COME AS YOUR FRIEND.
I AM AN UNFORTUNATE GIRL, DEVI! I... OH! PRAFULLA. IT'S YOU!

NO, SAGAR! PRAFULLA IS DEAD. NOW LET'S HURRY, WE HAVE TO FULFIL OUR VOW.

THAT NIGHT, A BARGE WAS ANCHORED ON THE BANK OF THE RIVER TRISROTA.

RANGARAJ! THAT IS THE BOAT. LEAD YOUR CANOE. SEE THAT THERE IS NO BLOODSHED.

RANGARAJ CAME TO HIS CANOE AND GAVE ORDERS.

...REMEMBER, NO KILLING. JUST TIE THEM UP.

AS SOON AS RANGARAJ'S CANOE CAUGHT UP WITH THE BOAT, HIS MEN JUMPED ONTO IT.

DACOITS!

DACOITS!

SPARE ME!

WITHIN A SHORT TIME, THE DACOITS TIED UP ALL THE BOATMEN AND CAUGHT HOLD OF BRAJESHWAR.

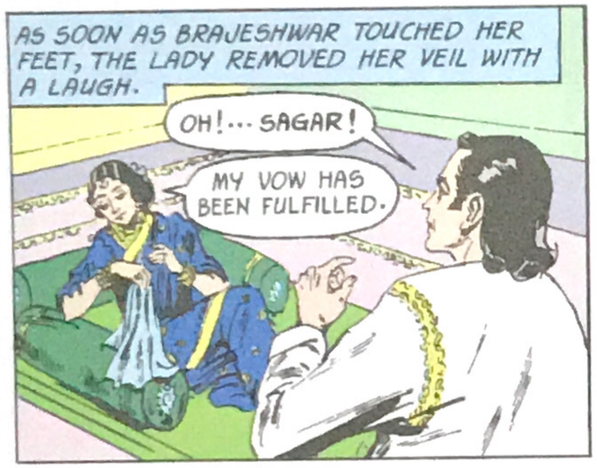
NOW TO DEVI RANI.

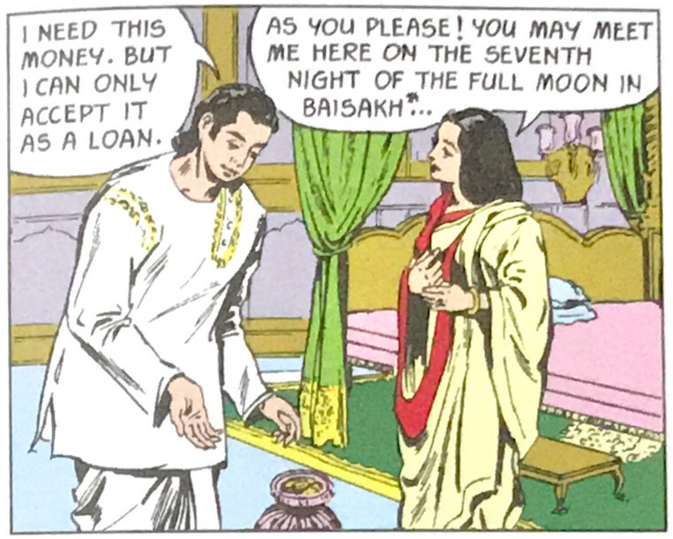
SO YOU ARE DEVI CHOUDHURANI'S GANG! I HEARD THAT SHE IS BEAUTIFUL AND YOUNG.

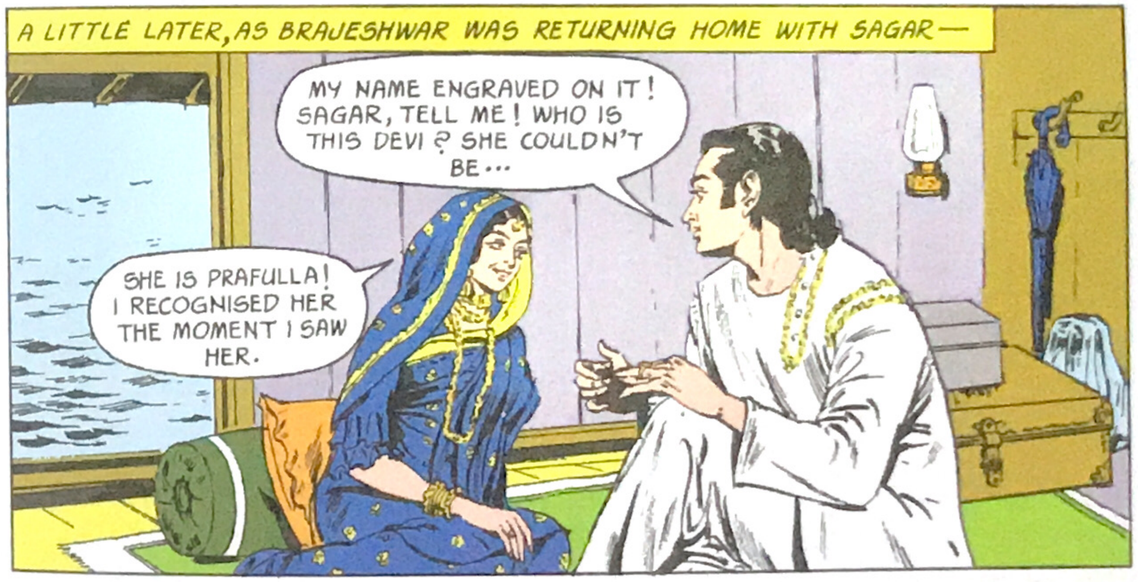
BRAJESHWAR WAS LED TO THE WAITING BARGE WHERE HE WAS LEFT IN FRONT OF A VEILED LADY.

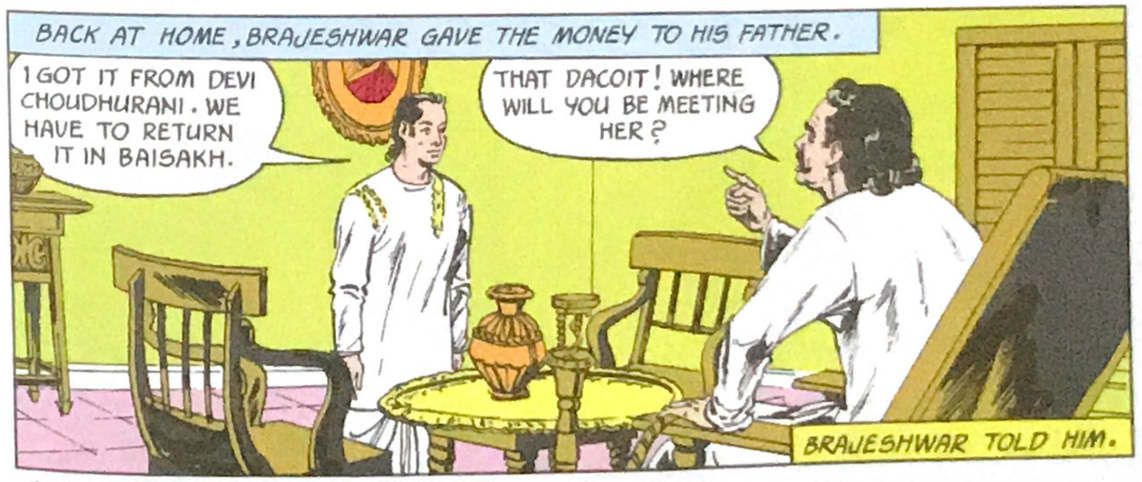
I DO NOT KNOW WHY YOU'VE BROUGHT ME HERE, DEVI!

I AM NOT DEVI! I HAVE BOUGHT YOU FROM HER. YOU ARE MY SLAVE NOW.





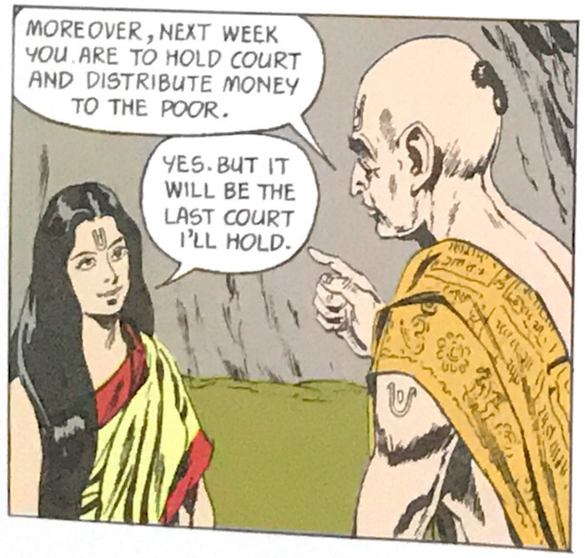


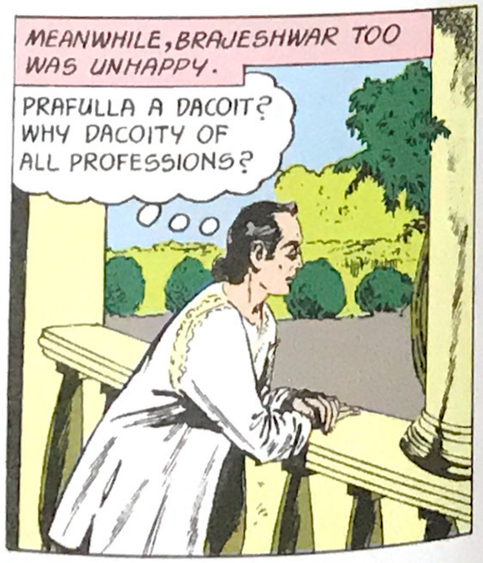


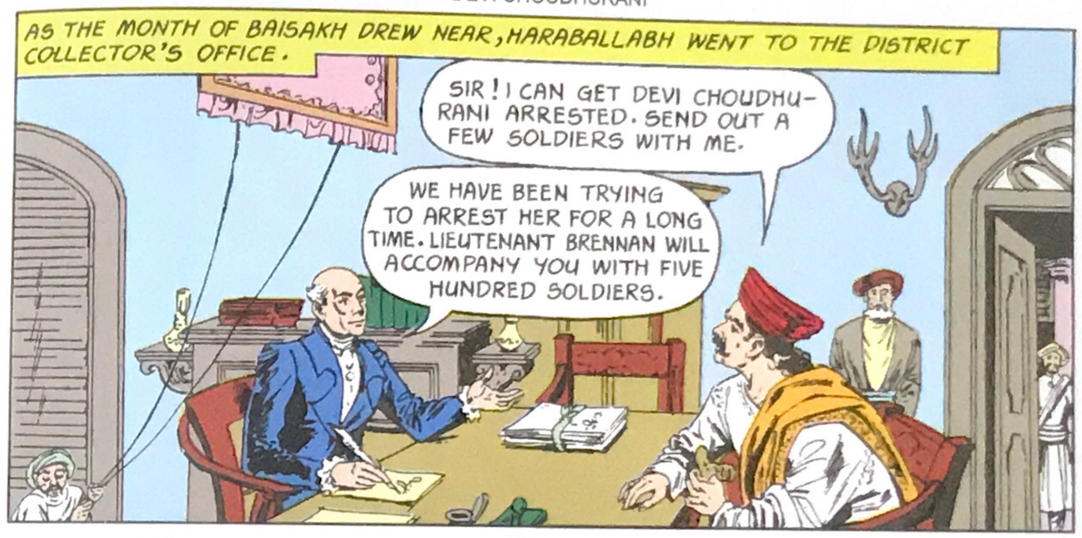
* A MONTH IN THE HINDU CALENDAR

RETURN THE TAINTED MONEY OF A DACOIT? NONSENSE. ON THE CONTRARY, HAND HER OVER TO THE POLICE AND COLLECT THE PRIZE-MONEY.

MEANWHILE, DEVI MET BHAVANI PATHAK.
THAKUR, I AM TIRED OF PLAYING QUEEN! TAKE ALL MY MONEY AND PERMIT ME TO GO BACK TO MY PEOPLE.
PEOPLE REVERE YOU AS A GODDESS. WITHOUT YOU OUR MISSION WOULD FAIL.

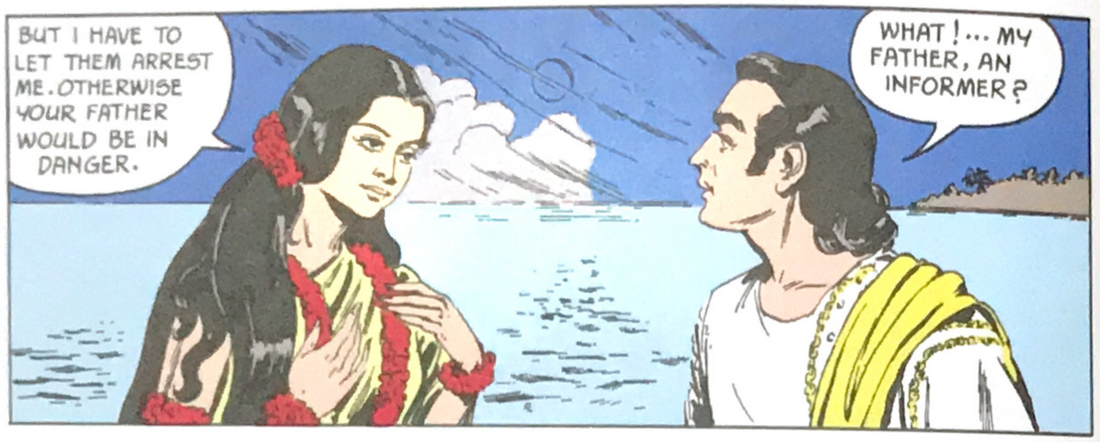

MOREOVER, NEXT WEEK YOU ARE TO HOLD COURT AND DISTRIBUTE MONEY TO THE POOR.
YES. BUT IT WILL BE THE LAST COURT I'LL HOLD.

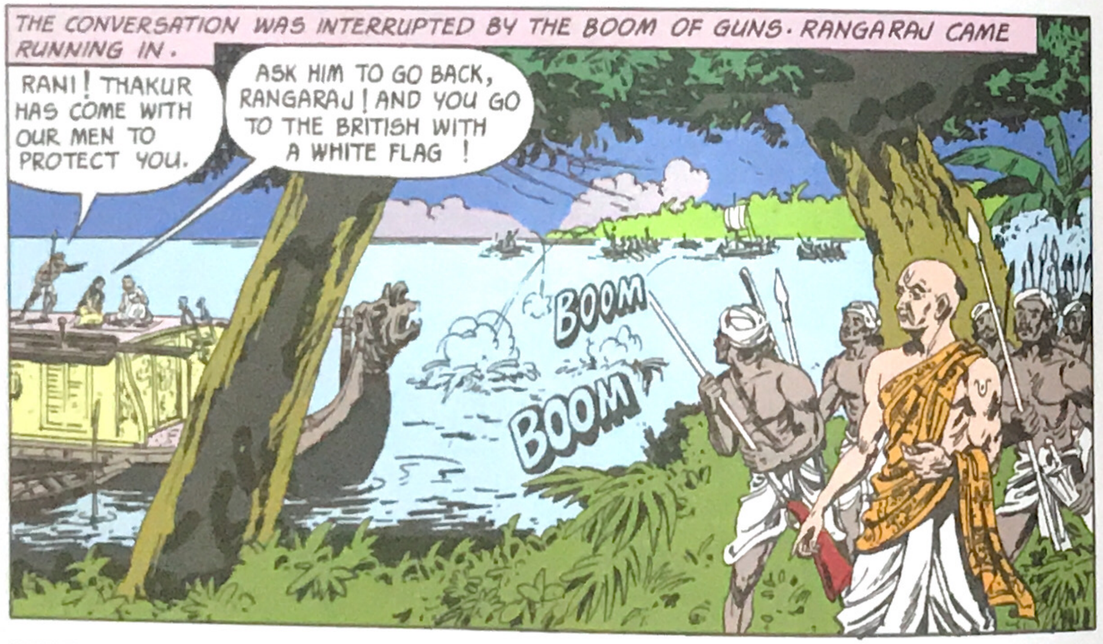

MEANWHILE, BRAJESHWAR TOO WAS UNHAPPY.
PRAFULLA A DACOIT? WHY DACOITY OF ALL PROFESSIONS?

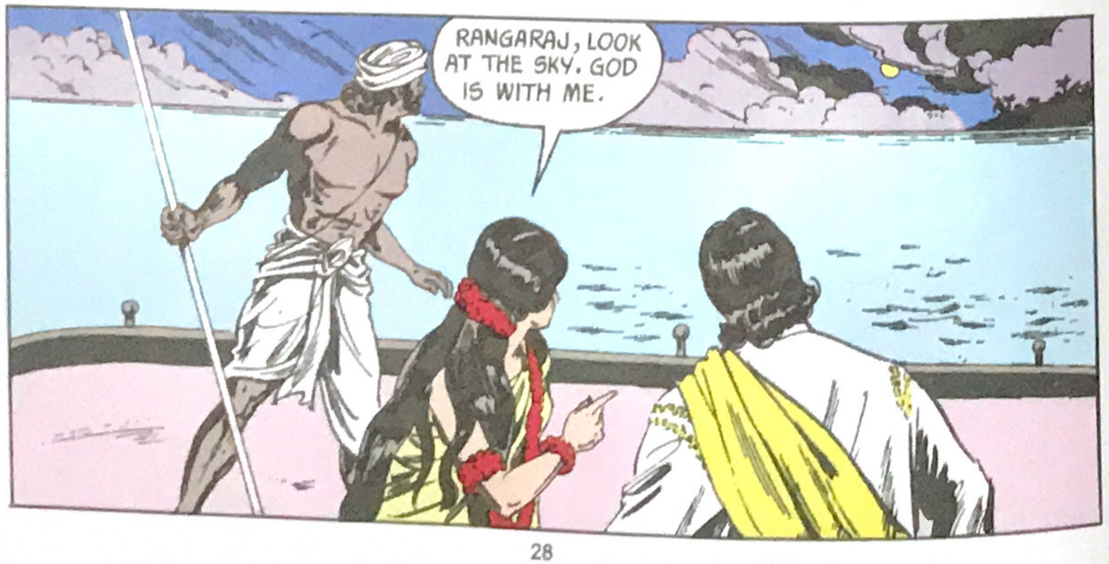

AS THE MONTH OF BAISAKH DREW NEAR, HARABALLABH WENT TO THE DISTRICT COLLECTOR'S OFFICE.
SIR! I CAN GET DEVI CHOUDHURANI ARRESTED. SEND OUT A FEW SOLDIERS WITH ME.
WE HAVE BEEN TRYING TO ARREST HER FOR A LONG TIME. LIEUTENANT BRENNAN WILL ACCOMPANY YOU WITH FIVE HUNDRED SOLDIERS.

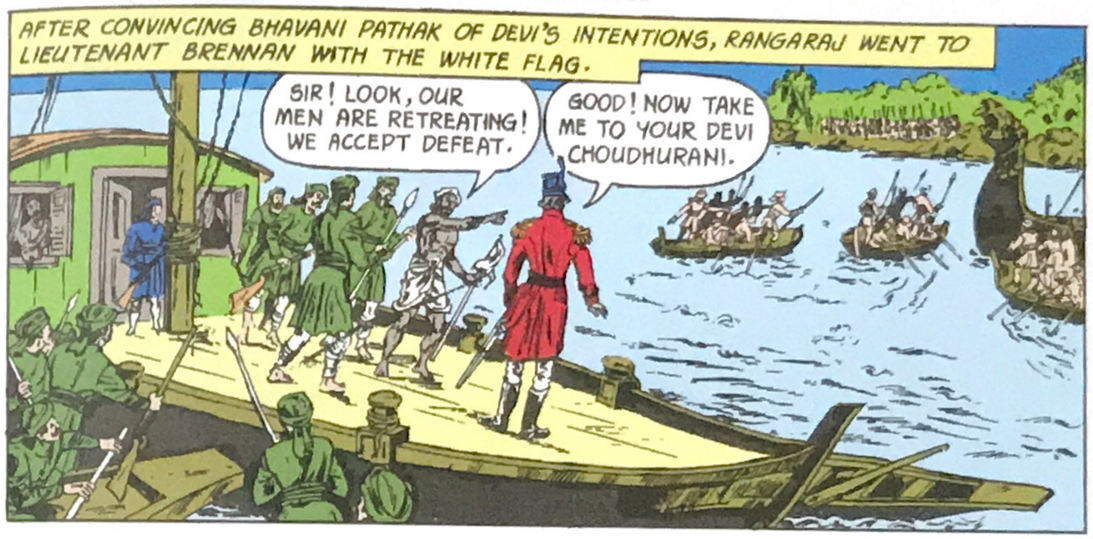
UNAWARE OF HIS FATHER'S MOVE, BRAJESHWAR WENT TO MEET DEVI ON THE APPOINTED DAY.
NOW IS THE TIME TO TELL YOU.
I AM SORRY, I COULD NOT RAISE THE MONEY. BUT PRAFULLA! WHY ARE YOU A DACOIT?

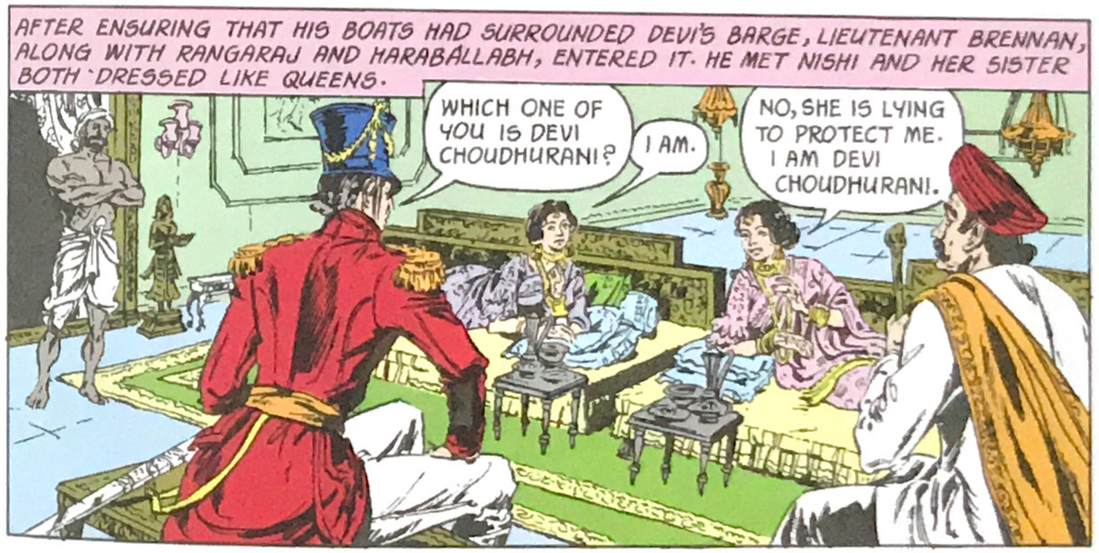
DEVI TOLD HIM THE WHOLE STORY.
NOW YOU KNOW EVERYTHING. BUT LEAVE THE BARGE IMMEDIATELY. THE BRITISH ARE COMING TO ARREST ME.
THEN I SHOULD BE HERE BY YOUR SIDE.

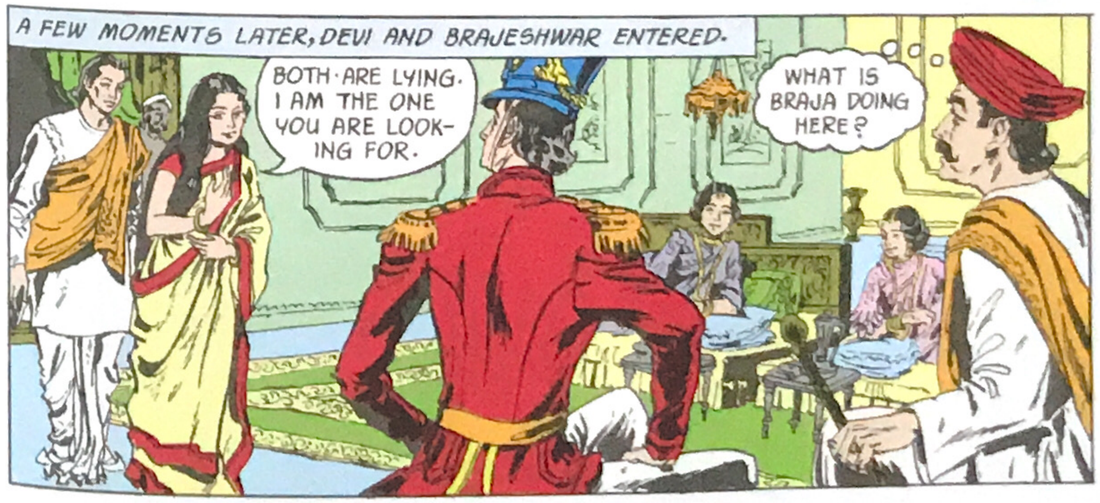

BUT I HAVE TO LET THEM ARREST ME. OTHERWISE YOUR FATHER WOULD BE IN DANGER.
WHAT!... MY FATHER, AN INFORMER?


THE CONVERSATION WAS INTERRUPTED BY THE BOOM OF GUNS. RANGARAJ CAME RUNNING IN.
RANI! THAKUR HAS COME WITH OUR MEN TO PROTECT YOU.
ASK HIM TO GO BACK, RANGARAJ! AND YOU GO TO THE BRITISH WITH A WHITE FLAG!
BOOM
BOOM

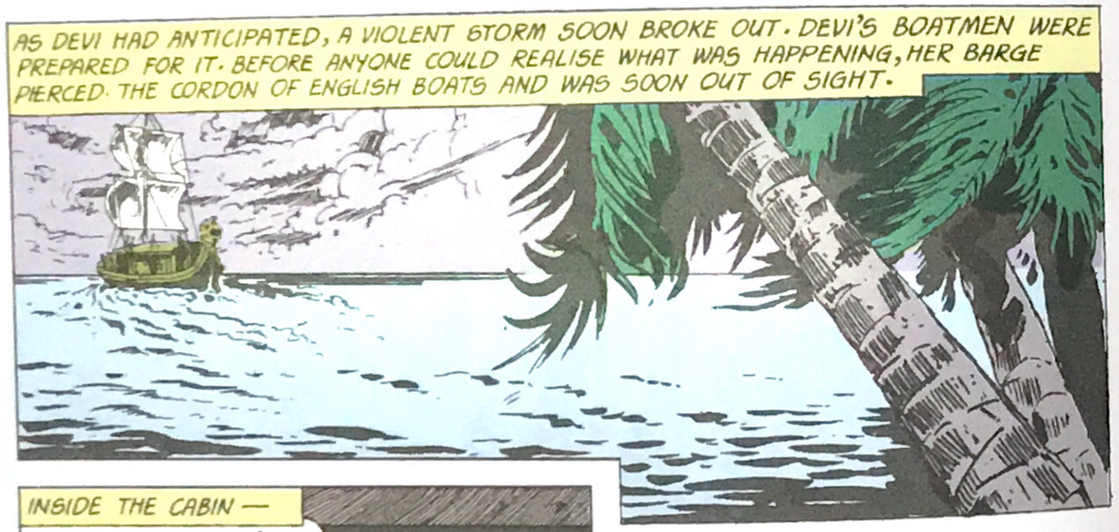

RANGARAJ, LOOK AT THE SKY. GOD IS WITH ME.


AFTER CONVINCING BHAVANI PATHAK OF DEVI'S INTENTIONS, RANGARAJ WENT TO LIEUTENANT BRENNAN WITH THE WHITE FLAG.
SIR! LOOK, OUR MEN ARE RETREATING! WE ACCEPT DEFEAT.
GOOD! NOW TAKE ME TO YOUR DEVI CHOUDHURANI.


AFTER ENSURING THAT HIS BOATS HAD SURROUNDED DEVI'S BARGE, LIEUTENANT BRENNAN, ALONG WITH RANGARAJ AND HARABALLABH, ENTERED IT. HE MET NISHI AND HER SISTER BOTH DRESSED LIKE QUEENS.
WHICH ONE OF YOU IS DEVI CHOUDHURANI?
I AM.
NO, SHE IS LYING TO PROTECT ME. I AM DEVI CHOUDHURANI.

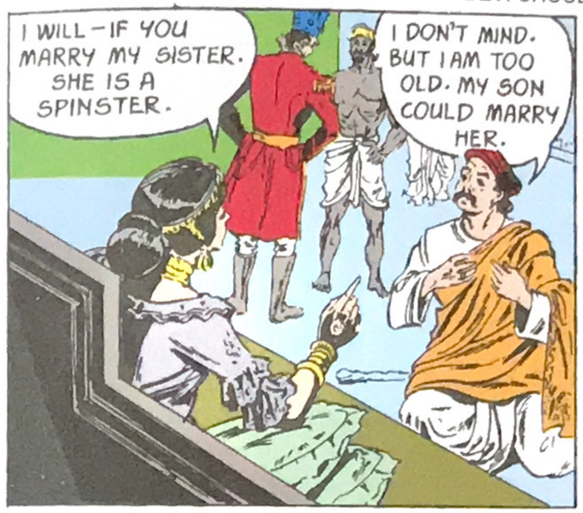

A FEW MOMENTS LATER, DEVI AND BRAJESHWAR ENTERED.
BOTH ARE LYING. I AM THE ONE YOU ARE LOOKING FOR.
WHAT IS BRAJA DOING HERE?

TO GAIN TIME, THE THREE LADIES WENT ON CONFUSING THE LIEUTENANT.
I AM DEVI CHOUDHURANI.
I AM.
I AM.
THAT ONE MUST BE A MAID. I'LL ARREST THE OTHER TWO AND DECIDE LATER.


AS DEVI HAD ANTICIPATED, A VIOLENT STORM SOON BROKE OUT. DEVI'S BOATMEN WERE PREPARED FOR IT. BEFORE ANYONE COULD REALISE WHAT WAS HAPPENING, HER BARGE PIERCED THE CORDON OF ENGLISH BOATS AND WAS SOON OUT OF SIGHT.

INSIDE THE CABIN —
SORRY, LIEUTENANT! YOU ARE OUR CAPTIVE NOW! IF YOU CARE TO LOOK THROUGH THE WINDOW YOU WILL REALISE WHAT I MEAN.

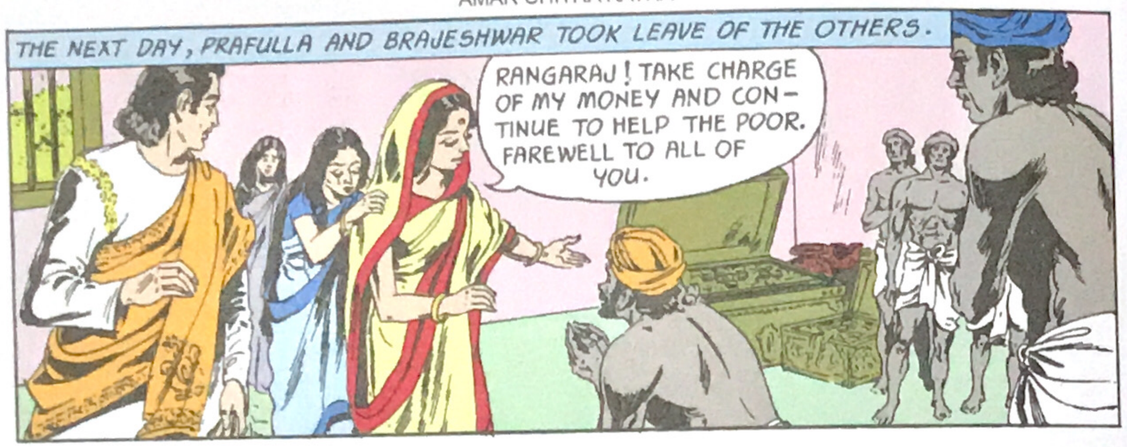
A FEW HOURS LATER NISHI, WHO WAS POSING AS DEVI, TURNED TO HARABALLABH—
WE HAVE DECIDED TO SENTENCE BOTH OF YOU TO DEATH.
PLEASE SPARE ME!

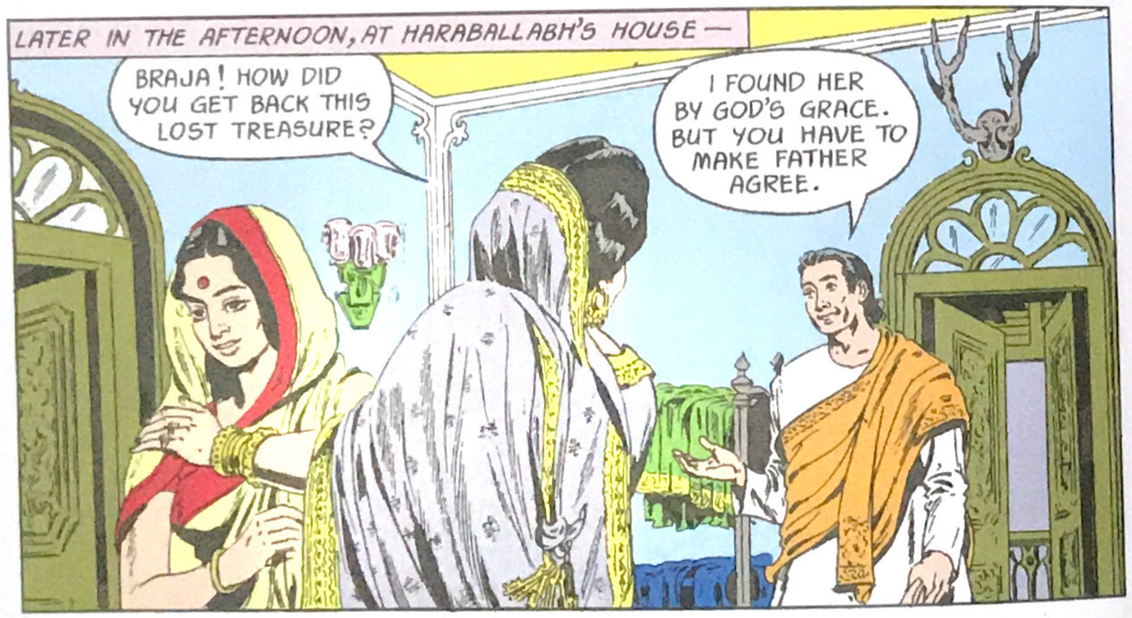

I WILL—IF YOU MARRY MY SISTER. SHE IS A SPINSTER.
I DON'T MIND. BUT I AM TOO OLD. MY SON COULD MARRY HER.

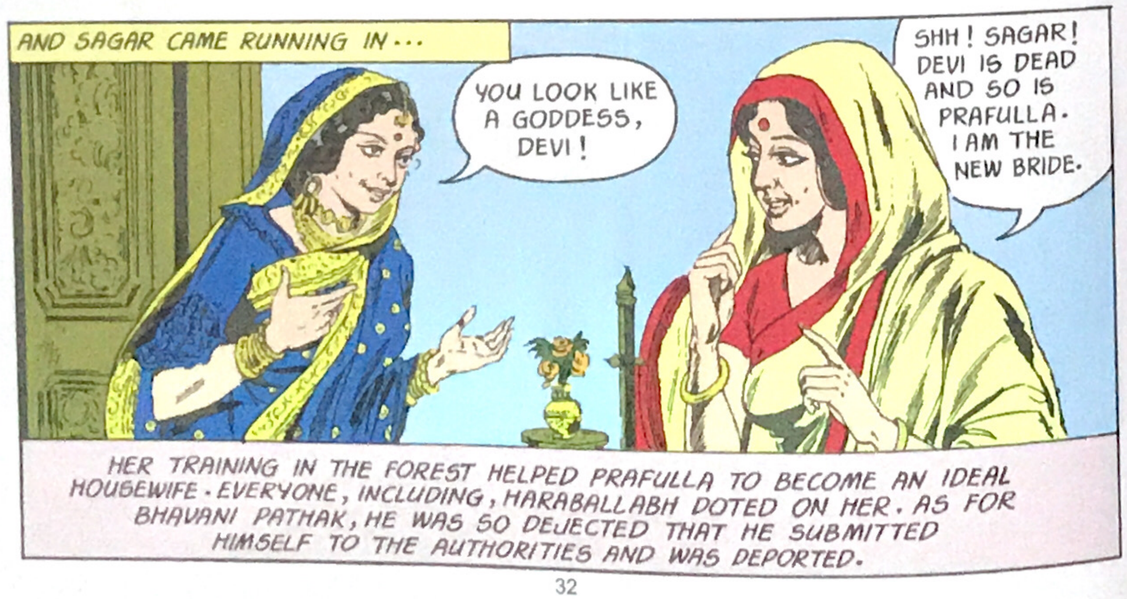
WELL THEN. YOU GO BACK TO YOUR HOUSE AND ARRANGE A RECEPTION FOR THE COUPLE.

THE NEXT MORNING, THE GALE STOPPED AND THE BARGE WAS ANCHORED. DEVI RELEASED BOTH HER CAPTIVES.
YOU ARE FREE TO GO, LIEUTENANT. AND DON'T TRY TO FIGHT US IN FUTURE.
I AM GRATEFUL TO YOU AND YOUR DEVI!

YOU MAY GO NOW, SIR! THE GROOM WILL STAY ON WITH US. THE COUPLE WILL COME TO YOUR HOUSE TOMORROW.
AS YOU SAY, DEVI.







WHICH OF THE ACKs HAVE YOU STILL NOT READ?

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Elephant Stories
Jackal Stories
Monkey Stories
Nandi Vishala
Stories Of Courage
Stories Of Wisdom
Tales Of Misers
The Deadly Feast
The Giant And The Dwarf
The Hidden Treasure
The Magic Chant
The Mouse Merchant
True Friends
Kanwal And Kehar
Kesari The Flying Thief
King Kusha
Manduka
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How The Jackal Ate The Elephant
The Brahmin And The Goat
The Dullard
The Greedy Mother-in-law
The Jackal And The Wardrum
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Raman The Matchless Wit
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Hemu
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